

Masterarbeit

Unraveling TikTok User Behavior and Consumer habits in a Comparative Study across Leading Social Media Platforms

von:

Shuang Xu

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Studiengang: Digital Media Management

Begutachter*in:

FH-Prof. Priv.-Doz. Dr. Andreas Gebesmair

Zweitbegutachter*in:

FH-Prof. Mag. Dr. Tassilo Pellegrini

St. Pölten, am 25.08.2024

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Acknowledgement

The final moment of writing this thesis means that two years of Master studies are coming to an end, beginning in the early autumn of 2022 and culminating in the late summer of 2024, I am embarking on a new journey in my life.

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莫愁前路无知己，天下谁人不识君。

Worry not there would be no confidants down the road ahead,
In this world no man does not recognize you as their friend.

——唐·高适 (704-765 AD) 《别董大二首》

——Tang Dynasty • Gao Shi (704-765 AD) «Farewell to Dong Da»

Xu Shuang

Vienna, 24. August 2024

Abstract

Problem statement: TikTok despite its young age has a tremendous userbase globally but also in Austria directly, its influence shapes user behavior and has a substantial foothold in E-Commerce. In so far that many brands host their official brand accounts on the platform. Despite its massive influence on online activity, there is a gap in academic literature concerning TikTok's role in modern online marketing compared to its more established counterparts YouTube and Instagram.

Methods: The aim of this study is to understand the behaviour and consumption habits of TikTok users in Austria and to compare how they differ on other mainstream short-form video platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, as well as to explore the uniqueness of TikTok users in Austria compared to other mainstream short-form video platforms. The chosen methodology is a focus group interview, to get insights from a curated sample size about how users interact with features and perceive advertisement on the platform.

Results: According to the results of the focus group and the analysis of relevant literature the conclusion is based upon these findings. In order to effectively market on TikTok, it is of the highest importance to understand each attribute of the platform and how they compare to the other market leading platforms. From user behavior to advertisement engagement and perception, considering all factors allows marketers to effectively leverage the algorithmic recommendation system to their advantage. Based on the results of the focus group interview, it was revealed that creative content, which is presented in a to the user relatable way is well perceived. Creativity is one of the most cited reasons users which dictates the users purchase intention.

Conclusions: This study primary focus lies on the application of online marketing on the platform TikTok and refers to marketing literatures exploring how these concepts interact on the platform. A sample size of seven users between the ages of 18-31 were interviewed. The research concerns itself with user behavior, platform development, business models on TikTok and comparative studies to adjacent platforms. It is critical for marketers in Austria to capitalize on the massive reach and instant content distribution on TikTok in order to further their foothold in the modern digital space.

Key words: TikTok, User behavior, social media marketing, Comparative study, TikTok E-Commerce.

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Abbreviations

APP	Application
AI	Artificial Intelligent
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
ICTs	Information/communication technologies
KOL	Key-Opinion-Leader
MRT	Media Richness Theory
PR	Public relations
SME	Social media engagement
SMM	Social media Marketing
SNSs	Social network sites
UGC	User-Generated-Content

1 Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

Founded in 2012 in China, ByteDance, the parent company of TikTok, seized opportunities in the expanding mobile Internet market. “Douyin”, the mainland China version, debuted in September 2016. TikTok's rapid global ascent, particularly in Southeast Asia, became a significant avenue for ByteDance's growth. The acquisition of Musical.ly in November 2017 and its integration with TikTok further solidified the platform's global standing. Today, TikTok serves as a global hub for mobile short-form videos, transcending its initial Chinese origins and actively shaping the global social media and content creation landscape (ByteDance, n.d., n.p.). The platform's ability to facilitate faster, more accurate, and widespread traffic dissemination has propelled mainstream media towards enhanced efficiency and effectiveness (Gebel, 2020, p.175). In October 2023, TikTok formally disclosed the demographic statistics pertaining to its user base in Germany and Austria for the inaugural time. Presently, TikTok boasts a monthly user count of 20.9 million in Germany and 2.1 million in Austria. This signifies a substantial presence, encompassing nearly a quarter of the populations in both Germany and Austria (TikTok, 2023, n.p.). In this rapidly advancing field, TikTok's impact on information dissemination, guidance, influence, and credibility has led to industry changing outcomes. However, despite its growing importance in shaping online interactions and consumer choices, a notable gap persists in our understanding of user behaviour and consumption habits on TikTok in comparison to well-established platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter (Šíma, 2021, p.195). A comprehensive comparative analysis of user behaviour across these platforms is imperative for gaining insights into the dynamics of contemporary online engagement (Wahid et al, 2023, p.107-108). Deconstructing and analysing the multi-faceted factors of TikTok user behaviour stands to offer invaluable insights with far-reaching applications in the realms of marketing strategy, content creation, and platform development. Furthermore, the discernment of variances in these behaviours compared to conventional platforms can

offer new ways for marketers, social media developers, and policymakers to facilitate new approaches in the fields of strategy, enhancement of user experience and adaptive response to emerging challenges (Šíma, 2021, p.196-197).

The impact of TikTok on the marketing sphere and customer journeys in a digital space has led to industry changing outcomes. However, despite being a current industrial juggernaut, there is a notable gap of academic analysis in regard to the inner mechanisations of TikTok. Deconstructing and analysing the main types of ad-campaigns which appear on the platform, can lay a solid foundation for marketers from Austria to conduct their own campaigns. Due to TikTok's unique younger target demographic, it is important to note the bases characteristics and how these users perceive and engage with advertisement on the platform. To make the target bases attributes more comprehensible, it is important to highlight the differentiating factors between overall user behaviours between short-video platforms.

1.2 State of Research

Throughout the Internet lifecycle, social networks have undergone a rapid evolution from isolated online communities to expansive global platforms. Technological advances have shifted users from passive consumption to active content creation. This evolution has led to a rise of rich media video networks in which users can create audio visual content and provide brands with the opportunity to advertise on the platform. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, pp. 214-218). With the spread of SMM, content marketing has developed into one of the significant parts of the SMM field. In social media marketing research, there is relatively little existing literature on emerging short-form video platforms such as TikTok compared to traditional platforms e.g. Facebook/Instagram. Despite the continues growth of TikTok globally as a new and efficient tool for brand marketing, especially in emerging markets, there is still limited research on the use of TikTok in Content Marketing.

While there is topic adjacent literature from Austria or the DACH-Region, such as the study of “effectiveness of advertising on SNSs” by Maurer & Wiegmann, most of this literature focuses on long established platforms such as Facebook, Instagram & YouTube.

Other literature such as by Gebel, A, focus on marketing in regard to industry-specific fields such as tourism (Maurer & Wiegmann, 2011).

The research by Wahid et al. has explored the impact of content features, language, and non-verbal messages on social media engagement (SME). In emerging markets, factors such as consumer behaviour and cultural differences make social media marketing more challenging for global brands. These contexts make the findings of previous academic research for global markets no longer fully applicable to emerging markets. The study of international marketing similarly lacks research into the application of language in social media. While traditional marketing research has proven that language plays a key part in global brand marketing efforts, the impact of language on the efficacy of marketing tactics in the social media environment has not been thoroughly investigated. (Wahid et al, 2023).

This shift to Instagram and TikTok, has resulted in the rise of a new industry of media KOL and influencer marketing (Haenlein et al, 2020, p.6). Also due to the major influence of short-video platforms, Influencer marketing became a major player. They offer massive reach, however there are concerns about authenticity and there is still a void of regulations to fill regarding how business is conducted. How well Influencers perform is directly intertwined with the market position of the platform. (Jahnke, 2021, pp.4). The study by Haenlein et al, gives an in-depth analysis of influencer marketing which includes how conduct influencer marketing in various industries and how to choose a fitting influencer (Haenlein et al, 2020).

Short video platforms like TikTok influence both traditional and digital economies. The term social commerce is used to distinguish business on social media platforms to regular commerce sites, it differs from traditional e-commerce by incorporating social elements like ratings, reviews, and recommendations. This allows users to directly give feedback. While platforms such as TikTok have a substantial following in the DACH-Region of Europe, there exists little to none over-arching research on the user behaviour and marketing strategies on social media platforms. There is however some research conducted on specific marketing types on social commerce on social media. The book

“Influencer Marketing” by Jahnke outlines varying different strategies which brands can use to effectively run advertisement campaigns on platforms such as TikTok. Most of the work focuses on the current situation of influencer marketing in a digital age, while hosting an accumulation of various studies conducted on specific aspects of influencer marketing. To highlight is the chapter “*TikTok: der neue Stern am Himmel*” by Sbai. This study goes into how TikTok’s features and characteristics lead influencers to adopt platform specific strategies to make their content go viral and reach an optimal audience engagement-ratio (Jahnke,2021; Sbai, 2021).

The vast majority of literature about TikTok’s user study on social media marketing can be either found from the US or Asia. The reason for this overwhelming representation from Southeast Asia is that TikTok’s E-Commerce is highly integrated, which means direct purchase from the platform TikTok itself is possible, with no need to jump to a third-party online shop or site. The study from Martini et al. present how TikTok’s short-video format influences customer behaviour and demonstrates how to effectively use these characteristics to form and run an online campaign. The unique characteristic of social media platforms to make content produced go “viral”, in essence a state where a post receives major user attention and gets shared, further boosting its presence in the algorithm. How the process works on TikTok is outlined by Le Compte & Klug (2021). Research from the US stretches into every possible niche, from studies which lay the groundwork for types of media all the way to deep-dives into online user behaviour.

1.3 Objectives & Research Question

This study is striving to address a substantial lack of existing literature by examining and cross-referencing the intricacies of TikTok user behaviour. This includes looking at consumption habits whilst also drawing comparative analyses with established patterns observed on other prominent social media platforms. The fundamental inquiries revolve around elucidating the main mechanisms which govern user engagement on TikTok, comprehending the dynamics of content consumption, and discerning their implications on the processes underlying consumer decision-making. The research not only holds

significance within the realm of academic inquiry but extends its impact to practical domains.

Research question:

1. How does advertisement on TikTok affect their user behaviour and consumer habits differ from and/or align with Instagram and YouTube?
2. How are advertisements on TikTok perceived in contrast to YouTube and Instagram?
3. What are the implications of these differences for marketing strategies, content creation, and platform development?

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

This study is split into 8 main chapters.

Chapter 1 describes the background and current status of the research and formulates the research questions, following with the structure of the whole thesis. Chapter 2 gives a brief overview of the history of social network sites (SNS) going throughout the technological developments and integration various types of media and user behaviour. Chapter 3 discusses how Media Richness Theory applies to TikTok delving into how multimedia content influences user engagement and interaction in regard which mechanisms which drive viral content and their influence on shaping user behaviour and customer journey.

Chapter 4 looks into e-commerce integration on TikTok leading to purchase decisions, brand engagement and user loyalty. A look on how Rich- and Lean-Media are used on social platforms, with a focus on TikTok's "Live-shopping" service. Chapter 5 focuses on comparing the variances in user behaviour on different social media platforms. How the attributes of each platform influence a user's customer journey.

Chapter 6 goes into detail about the implementation process of the focus group with mythology procedure, questions and interview guideline as well as the research

population and sample are presented. Chapter 7 descriptive and qualitative analysed the focus group's discussion. The 8 and final chapter is the conclusion, summarizes the empirical study and the research questions are answered, which also discusses the limitations of the work and gives a research outlook.

2 Overview of Social Media Marketing

This chapter gives a brief overview of the history of social network sites (SNS) ranging from the 90s to the current day, going throughout the technological innovations which allowed websites to integrate various types of media. This chapter also delves into the user behaviour on SNS platforms, taking into consideration the attributes of userbases from age range to customer and general metrics of user behaviour,

2.1 Marketing Evolution on Social Media Platforms

Social network sites (SNSs) emerged in the late 90s and has evolved hand-in hand with technological advancements throughout the 2000s. At the beginning of 2003, SNSs started to appear more frequently and branch out into different avenues such as Business, traveling, religion, events, and social relationships. By that time SNSs became more and more popular globally and blogging services with full SNSs functionality appeared more frequently. As the trend of UGC and social media grew in popularity, platforms who focused on media-sharing started to implement SNS features and gradually turned into SNS themselves. This development led to social media platforms like YouTube venturing into video-content sharing, Instagram into picture and comment sharing (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, pp.214-218).

Because of the then spread of niche online communities, this facilitated users to share experiences and recommendations on various topics. Over time these communities grew, and media was shared far and wide. With these developments the basics of user-generated content were set. The jump to web 2.0 allowed UGC (User-generated content) to spread more rapidly throughout the web. Social media marketing was still a small part of the market at the time compared to large websites and search engines, but it was growing at a very fast pace. Social media Platforms like Myspace and Facebook made a basic structure which was readily available to advertise on with display ads and UGC. It pushed the change of consumers to active producers and distributors of content. Over time, marketing strategies had become more complex, Social media channels like Facebook

and Instagram had further revolutionized social media marketing by emphasizing dynamic content and real-time interaction (Maurer & Wiegmann, 2011, pp. 485-486 / Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p.218).

By emphasizing content in cross-platform settings on these platforms, advertisement could be portrayed via different media types. Content marketing is a relatively young discipline within marketing and has been gaining traction since 2013. Content marketing is a strategic approach. It is a cross-channel strategic approach and a specific type of marketing communication, defined primarily by the content of the communication. These strategic principles and content are communicated through various channels (websites, YouTube channels, social media, newsletters, etc.) (Hörner, 2022, p.5).

Video-sharing platforms like YouTube opened the doors for users to engage in free content creation, this led to certain Youtubers gathering audiences, where their opinion on products, media or services could increase or decrease sales. The more video-sharing platforms grew, the more influence these users attained. Thus, in the middle 2010s the term “Influencer” was born. Influencer Marketing has emerged within the past decade and has received mainstream attention circa 2016. Since the marketing model has established itself as a viable tool to circumvent adblocking technologies like AdBlock, it has become a mainstay in many marketing plans and budgets. Unlike many other marketing-strategies, influencers have a polarizing quality to them. The target demographic either hold disdain or admiration for the advertisement strategy. Young users in particular view certain influencers as more credible than traditional media-advertisement found on TV- Radio etc. Through the low-entry bar to find a hold in the market, Influencers can use the internet to build their own audience (Jahnke, 2021, p.3).

Around the middle of the 2010s the video-platform TikTok reached monumental mainstream success and made the short-video format popular. However, TikTok was not the first platform to introduce short videos as a content medium. Other platforms such as Vine and “Kuaishou (Chinese social media App)” had gathered already large audiences. What made TikTok stand out from its competition was its focus on community driven

“challenges” and dance-focused content. Many young people started to view other platforms like YouTube or Facebook as “uncool”, strictly because of the differing user bases. These more established platforms hosted a generally older user base. TikTok heavily benefited from the at the time coming of age Gen Z. This led to TikTok being able to directly compete with the US-based market leaders. Due to TikTok’s meteoric rise in popularity, the other platforms introduced their own short-video services, such as “Instagram Reels” and “YouTube Shorts”. This only further boosted the presence of the short-video format. Currently the format has been employed in every possible content sphere, from Memes to News, to sharing of social campaigns etc. Short-videos have become a mainstay in current video content-production (Kaye, Zeng & Wikstrom, 2022, pp.7-8).

During the COVID-19 pandemic companies put more resources into funding influencers since traditional strategies were hampered by lockdowns. The novelty of short video platforms such a TikTok allowed Influencer Marketing to achieve phenomenal audience-reach quotas. Since the trend is still relatively young, there is a distinct lack of market regulation regarding clear KPIs. This allows posts to be advertisement material without telling the audience. Further issues can involve the buying of fake followers, essentially bots who boost the influencers exposure in the algorithm, thus yielding a higher potential audience-reach. Despite all the advantages, Influencer Marketing is still bound to the big social media platforms, giving them limited reach outside the internet-environment (Jahnke, 2021, pp.4)

The influence of web-based social media is far reaching, it encompasses both economy and digital economy. Social media und E-Commerce work in tandem in modern online shopping. Social Commerce differentiates itself from traditional e-commerce are social elements, such as customer ratings, reviews, user recommendations etc. The elements contribute to a dynamic feedback loop, where constant user input is received in real time. For users the social aspects create a known environment in which they can express their views and perspectives (Ahrholdt et al, 2023, pp.368-369).

2.2 User Behaviour and Consumer Habits in Digital Environments

User behaviour and consumer habits vary between platforms. There are many uniquely different factors which influence decision making. Advertisement can be tailored to fit the target demographic on a given platform. Some of the reasons for the varying differences can be found in the user bases e.g. YouTube is noted for its long-format video material and a more adult audience, given the platforms almost 20-year presence. On the other hand, the platform TikTok hosts an on average younger audience, with different interests (Jahnke, 2021, p.3).

Due to online social platforms guiding most internet traffic, there is fertile ground for advertisement to conduct business on them. Understanding how users engage with content is vital for brands to manoeuvre the online scape effectively. A study by Benevenuto et al. pulled an aggregate data pool of various users within a 12-day period. To note is that the study was conducted in 2010 and may not be contemporary anymore, given how much the modern internet landscape changed throughout the years. However, there are still insights to be had from the study. The study shows that the accessed the platforms at different rates during and various duration periods. The average user spent not more than 10 minutes on average per day on social media. The outliers in the spectrum spent either just a few minutes per week online or the most active users could spend up to 12 hours on a given platform. Since the results were so varied a proper median which could give an overview between all users could not be established. However, comparing the most popular activities on the platforms and comparing them cross-platform, shows that users heavily preferred to look at the activities of users in their online-social circles. The results were overlapping between the social networks MySpace and Orkut, the only outlier being LinkedIn. On LinkedIn only about 4 percent of users engaged with other users via direct messages and adjacent activities (Benevenuto et.al., 2009, pp. 52-54)

The study concluded that a major part of the at the time drive to engage with content material was the drive for users to join communities. This means content was disseminated most readily from these communities, which share certain interests, goals

or ambitions (Benevenuto et.al., 2009, p. 61)

2.2.1 Metrics of User behaviour

It is crucial for an affective campaign to understand which type of users are present within the target demographic. From the bases preferences ranging to habits all the way to the current perception of advertised goods and services.

In order to be able to evaluate user and customer behaviour, certain strategies can be employed. One of these techniques is “Social listening”. This technique functions as tool to observe every possible conversation about a product, brand or other advertised goods and services is spoken about. This is accomplished by raising questions regarding how the brand, product etc. is being perceived by the broader demographic. These questions range various topics and criteria. Some examples include potential risk-assessment, if the advertisement contains sensitive material which could harm the reputation of the brand, to qualitative and quantitatively analyses. These include the expectations of the customers and analysis of market competitor campaigns. Based on these metrics, it is possible to prevent any negative effects pre-emptively if all criteria are made before launching a campaign (Ahrholdt et al, 2023, p. 77)

Social Network Sites tend to show a lot of raw data about total user counts. These factors show a very basic overview of potential market potential, relevant data can only be gathered when the raw data, also called “vanity metrics” can be diverted into active user engagement. The potential audience reach could be large, this doesn’t guarantee that users engage with the presented content. This is why getting accurate reading on the data is of the highest priority. Since even factors such as Views and Likes on posts can only show how many users interacted with the advertisement on a superficial level. Social Listening intends to reveal useful information from the aggregated raw data. The goal is to turn audience reach into tangible KPI. It is vital to differentiate actual audience reach and potential audience reach. There are several factors which must be considered. Some of these include Influence and Mentions. These factors give a clear picture of the reach and perception of the Brand or advertisement (Ahrholdt et al, 2023, pp. 78-79).

3 Discovering TikTok's Media Impact and User Behaviour

This part delves into how Media Richness Theory applies to TikTok. Here is an analysis of how multimedia content influences user engagement and interaction. The second section focuses on the various mechanisms which drive viral content and their role on social networks in shaping user behaviour. The last chapter goes into the overall customer journey on TikTok.

3.1 Media Richness Theory and TikTok

In the 1980s, media began to diversify with the development of computerised communication technologies, and in 1986 Daft and Lengyel published Media Richness Theory (MRT). Media richness, also known as information richness, relates to a potentially medium's ability to carry information as well as the practical consequence of the content of the information it shares (Daft & Lengyel, 1986, pp.554-555). A medium that can overcome differing knowledge backgrounds or clarify ambiguous issues so that both parties may reach a shared understanding is considered high richness, whereas a communication technique that takes a long time to grasp or delivers insufficient information is considered poor richness. People use different media for varied message contents and communication objectives, and their decisions are based on the amount of information carried by the medium and the characteristics of the work to be completed. More concise media are preferred for clear and analytical tasks, while richer media are considered for tasks that involve more personal thinking, creativity and personal agency (Daft & Lengyel, 1986, pp.559-560).

In the late 1990s, American scholars such as Dennis et al. conducted synchronic and comparative studies of media richness theory and media lean theory, and also analysed the role and influence of gender studies in media richness theory. Research on MRT since the 2000s has focused on emerging media, the impact of media richness on user loyalty, users' trust and honesty behaviour, the application of MRT to system design, and the application of media richness theory to research on the use of ICTs.

Since the internet became more accessible to the average person and led to world-wide mainstream adaption by the mid-to late 90s, several studies emerged to analyse the effectiveness of various media theories on e-commerce. One of these earlier studies is the study by Dennis and Kinney (1998) focusing on the application of RMT in comparison to lean media. The researchers argue that within the bounds of their study, richer media performed just as well as lean media. This is based on a primarily text-based format. In the study there was an inherent information delay regarding the primarily typed product advertisement. While the lean media content was on average more slowly transmitted to the user, the overall results were similar. Dennis and Kinney argue that no media is inherently superior to another, the deciding factors are the means of which the media get transmitted to the customer. The results were largely based on several time and customer satisfaction-dependent categories which influence overall efficacy of the tested media (Dennis & Kinney, 1998, p.267). The emphasis is set upon the customers perception of the consumed media. Dennis and Kinney argue that the controlled test environments could skewer the results of Rich Media Theory applications (Dennis & Kinney, 1998, p.269).

Whilst at that current time the findings suggested that both theories were equally valuable, the researchers argue that the assertion that Rich Media Theory has inherent advantages over Lean Media, to be false. A factor which could be argued against Rich Media Theory is that the theory tries to incorporate too many various components such as fast feedback and interaction under the same umbrella term. The deciding factor according to the researchers is in which medium and in what way the information is transmitted. These factors also are highly influenced by the perception of the individual user. A factor which Dennis and Kinney highlight is how the media-theory is resistant to empirical-evidenced based research is it's steadily changing mediums. Due to technological advancements, research about Rich and Lean Media Theory must be adapted to new mediums. Meaning that future mediums could change the variables enough to that Rich Media could have advantages over Lean Media (Dennis & Kinney, 1998, P. 269-270).

As the Internet reached new audiences at the start of the new Millennium, more and more users who ventured online were female. This changed the average demographic split of

the online-user base to an almost 50/50 split between male and female. Thus, new research emerged to show how the influx of new online users was affecting the application of Rich Media Theory. One of these studies include a follow-up work by Dennis and Kinney in 1999. In this study the performance of Rich Media regarding efficacy of feedback and decision making by text-messages was analysed and how the gender balance influenced the results (Dennis & Kinney, 1999, p.410).

Communication between the genders was distinct enough to be visible even via text-based messages. The findings suggest women tend to be able to express themselves more clearly without non-verbal cues as compared to men. Primarily engaging in social based behaviour with a distinct focus on communication with the adjacent person, in a sense to continue an ongoing conversation to land on an accepted consensus on a subject matter. Men on the other hand were more focused on straight-forward information distribution and a in general more competitive approach (Dennis & Kinney, 1999, p.411).

It is argued that Rich Media allows for faster communication due to the increased ability to share communication cues as compared to lean media. It was found that women engaged more readily in rich media than men, who preferred to spend less time on long conversation. These factors alone don't influence general output even if lean media on average comes at a delay cost due to the information being more constrained. It was shown that Rich Media was more influential on women in general (Dennis & Kinney, 1999, pp.412-414).

The final result showed that on men the Rich Media Theory didn't apply as well as on women. Lean Media was more preferred by men in regard to communication, since they on average couldn't find a consensus on a given topic. Compared to men, Rich Media theory applied and correctly predicted the performance of all female teams regarding lean media. Female Teams were less effective with lean media than compared to them using rich media. The findings also indicate that in mixed-gender teams, men were more dominant in means of communication, on average pushing lean media over rich-media (Dennis & Kinney, 1999, p.430).

Now that there were sufficient analyses of the Rich-Media Theory regarding communication based on computer networks. Research was conducted to find the most optimal way media could be displayed to the end-user. An approach presented here is the concept of Media Synchronicity. This approach tries to tie-in the benefits of Rich and Lean Media Theory. It generates a new theory in which the purpose of it is to adapt the media to a given task instead of using a single approach broadly. In a further study by Dennis A. the new approach is meant to increase general efficacy to the application of media theory (Dennis & Kinney, 1999, p.1).

Dennis challenges the assertion that Rich Media enhances the rate of dissemination of information in a shorter time-period. For information to be retained, the receiver of said information must fully comprehend the intent and meaning of the received message, this relies on several factors such as the ability to respond with feedback and the rehearsal ability of the content (Dennis & Kinney, 1999, p.2). Synchronized Media puts forward that Rich and Lean media should be incorporated for varying tasks. Lean media, in a sense, purely text-based information with little to no visual aid is best suited for information conveyance. Rich Media which includes verbal and more visually based cues is better suited for information retention. The proposed advantage is the flexibility of the method to be more easily adapted to a given medium. Feedback and decision-making are better suited to the Rich Media aspect, since it includes broader social aspects like face-to-face communication instead of direct computer messaging (Dennis & Kinney, 1999, p.5).

The researchers propose that this hybrid approach is ideal for group information dissemination. In essence, the media which excels at conveying information is not suited for media which is better at convergence. This term is used in this context as a means in which information is transformed and retained in individuals. According to the results of the papers findings the optimal approach to transmit information is to adapt the medium to the individual situation, context and target group (Dennis & Kinney, 1999, pp.8-9).

Media Richness Theory is being applied on multiple social media platforms. The theories premise states, that the richness of a communication medium or content influences its

capability to efficiently convey and distribute information while reducing ambiguity, this means the delivered content is clear to the user. Social media platforms utilize various forms of rich media—videos, images, and interactive features to try to increase the rate of user engagement. TikTok is a platform specialized with the short-video format, these formats follow the principles of MRT by offering a rich media integration that combines audio-visual and textual elements. This multimedia richness allows for immediate feedback and interactions between users, which leads to them participating in trends, challenges, and collaborative content creation. TikTok applies media richness to drive up the rate of user engagement, interaction, and content virality. These factors showcase how RMT is applied on the platform.

3.1.1 Effect of Media Richness on User behaviour in a Digital Environment

Daft and Lengel identified four dimensions for determining media richness, which are:

- *Capacity for immediate feedback*, i.e., the ability to allow questions to be responded to and changes made in real time.
- *The number of cues and channels utilized*, such as face-to-face contact, voice tones, body postures, digital, textual, and pictorial messages.
- *Linguistic variety*, this refers to the variety of meanings that can be expressed by language symbols.
- *Personalization*, i.e., the message can be conveyed more completely when the individual's feelings and emotions are immersed in the communication process (Daft &Lengel, 1986, p.560).

These four latitudes of media richness can positively influence the user loyalty of IM systems by enhancing the utility value, social value, and self-expression value and gold user loyalty, while on the other hand, linguistic diversity adds to all three of these values in the application of IM systems (Tseng et al., 2017, pp. 20-21). These four factors are all present on social channel platforms. Rich media plays an important function in transmitting information to users. The ability to create, comment, share audio-visual

material allows for all four latitudes to be incorporated.

When purchasing online, consumers often need to consider additional trust and risk concerns, with user trust being related to the amount of information communicated by the medium and the capacity to resolve confusion throughout the encounter. Aljukhadar et al. examined trust in two dimensions: agent trust and retailer trust and came across that in a high media richness environment, media richness indirectly influences users' perceived risk and purchase intention via agent trust, demonstrating that different media richness affects consumers' purchase intention differently in e-commerce. This demonstrates how diverse media richness influences customers' desire to buy in e-commerce (Aljukhadar et al., 2010, p. 116). The Customers perception of rich media content is a driving force which motivates the user to either look for, engage and purchase products. Since e-commerce offers interactive mediums for customers to engage with, this allows marketers to tweak the out-put of information to a specific platform. The output of information coincides with the method of telepresence on platforms.

In the application of telepresence in e-commerce websites, the part of the user control to the implication and the high richness of the medium can achieve a higher level of telepresence, which can enhance the cognitive response of the user to the website and obtain a higher perception of reality. In studies of the impact of system design on user experience, system media richness tends to have a consistent positive effect. The method proves to be a more affordable way to conduct research in contrast to methods like sampling, for example: products which are not physically interactable are better off as virtual experiences, here the search attributes are the main factors of the product. The research indicates that a simpler approach in online-marketing can yield better results than traditional one or two-way advertising, since they are easier to create, and the factor of user control is emphasized in order to find the optimal level of information output. The ability to tailor the information load in a fast and easy way is a further advantage virtual experiences have over traditional methods like television or radio. (Klein, 2003, pp.52-53).

In the study of the influence of media richness theory on the willingness to use and satisfaction with information and communication technologies, researchers from Taiwan discovered a positive influence on the factors influencing the willingness to use blogs, and it can be proven that media richness not only affects users' opinions and dispositions to use blogs directly, but also strengthens the opinions and willingness to use blogs indirectly by increasing the perceived. Higher media richness can eliminate the unclear nature of information, boosting the efficiency of content distribution. (Chang, & Yang, 2013, p. 382).

When social media users are drawn to product-promoting content when perusing social media sites like Instagram, there is a positive association between social media richness and intention to purchase, resulting in purchase intention. The attractiveness of social media, media content and user interface are indicators of media richness of social media platforms. When users are immersed in media richness on one platform, there is a high probability that they will not follow other social media applications that offer the same service. High user retention leads to brand loyalty, users will stick to their platform of choice if the media richness is presented in an adequate fashion. High rich media engagement can turn to a high rate of purchase intent. The presented content is a main factor which can lead to a high rate of purchase intent; however, the content has to be combined with the appropriate rich media. This means the features and functions of the platform have to work in tandem to facilitate an easy way to disseminate content and boost its algorithmic presence. Social media platforms use various types of formats, user interfaces, features and functions in order to combine all of them into a compelling rich media package in order to boost the purchase intent of the user (Hasim et al, 2020, pp.1007-1008).

3.1.2 The Character of Multimedia Content on User Engagement

Various platforms have integrated a diverse range of user interfaces to strengthen the visual and interactive nature of their rich media content. The integration can vary from the available content, ads and interfaces. One example of how rich media gets

incorporated into the content side of platforms are TikTok's short videos, which combine music, special effects, and interactive elements, are a prime example of how media-rich theories can be fulfilled.

Compared to other platforms, TikTok relies primarily on the short video content dissemination. Its primary competitor YouTube on the other hand focuses on long form video-content. Both share many overlapping features, such as a subscription model for users to be informed about new content uploaded from the uploader, comments, and the ability to share and like the video. In terms of Rich Media in advertisement, YouTube has a novel model, where commercials can appear before the start, between or after playing a video. This model mirrors the traditional television ad-display model the closest out of the leading social media platforms.

All these integrated features and formats are in place to drive user engagement. The engagement is driven by personal factors. User engagement relies on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects. Among these, the behavioural aspect is the most dominant factor on social media. These aspects primarily rely on the consumed and presented content. Rich media, which encompasses content in the audio-visual spectrum drives user engagement. The content reaches the user on an individual level. Positive experiences lead to a higher rate of user engagement since these users are more likely to share the aforementioned content. Another way the overall topic gets more attention is through the creation of content which fall under the same rough category as the previously consumed content. Annamalai et al. looked into how sport clubs increase fan engagement. The study shows that most material comes organically from users and these users share, like, comment and thus boost the club's presence on the algorithm making it more visible to new users. Since overall aggregated content engagement is not shown on social media, the study went into detail about viewing how many posts, likes and shares and hashtags were associated with a certain event. The user behaviour changed drastically depending on if the outcome of a match was played successfully or lost. Either way, both outcomes generated high user engagement (Annamalai et al, 2021, p.2).

A high rate of engagement on social networks with other users can lead to interest communities forming. Some users intertwine their own personal lives into their online presence. Users who tend to share a lot of personal information with little regard to privacy concerns, tend to engage more with content by default and may be more relatable to other users who in turn could feel more comfortable to interact with the content (Schmidt, 2006, p.15)

The interacted content is of essence, since it is what drives the engagement in the first place. The type of response the rich media receives depends on whether the post is positive or negative and most importantly, if the userbase agrees with the sentiment or appreciate presented advertisement. Posts with high likes are generally positively received. Posts which aren't positively received have a generally higher user engagement. This engagement however may not be desirable, especially if the goal of the post is to advertise (Shahbaznezhad et al, 2021, p.62)

3.2 Social Influence and Information Diffusion of TikTok

3.2.1 Social Influence on TikTok

The social influence from TikTok's User can be categorized in three parts: "Influencer", "Content creator" & "Engagement".

Influencers come in several different shapes. How an influencer is determined is by audience size. There are Micro and Nano-Influencer, these users have an audience size between 10-50000 followers. This definition is not set in stone however, it depends on the influencers field of interest. Nano-Influencers are by far the smallest but are the most relatable to their followers. The biggest are the Macro-influencers, their audience can have between 50000 to a million followers on average. They have the highest rate of professionalism but don't have a high audience engagement rate due to the sheer number of followers. Last to mention are the virtual influencers, these have emerged as a growing trend. They can wildly range in follower size, since the trend is relatively young (Jahnke, 2021, pp.15-17).

Influencers are content creators but not every content creator is an influencer. This means that the influencer is a sub-category of content creator. They both share many similar characteristics but differ dramatically in function and goals. Both have to appeal to their audience in order to grow. Furthermore, both have to be skilled in presenting and creating their content. The absolutely differentiating factor is that influencers are more focused on the monetary aspect of brand partnerships and guiding users on a customer journey. Content creators on the other hand are more invested in connecting with people who have similar interests to them (Schwartz, 2023, n.p).

Due to Influencers having a substantial amount of leverage on social network services, especially TikTok, these individual users have the reputational pull to affect the opinions and purchase intent of many users. Influencers with a huge following attract the attention of enterprises and businesses looking for ways to promote their goods and services. Since the user base on TikTok is made up of younger users who have an on average high rate of engagement, information can be diffused at substantial speed, reaching other communities and individual users. Some influencer content is of a high-production value and investing in them can present itself as a viable marketing strategy, thereby further contributing to the social influence of the influencers (Gebel, 2020, p.176).

As described in Chapter 2.2.1 engagement metrics/interaction data such as likes, comments, reviews and followers etc. show the influence of a user, and high engagement/substantial interaction data usually increases the influencer's or content creator's threshold and influence over the average user on the platform.

In analysing TikTok's algorithmic process, Bhandari and Bimo (2020) discovered that the social patterns that emerge when using TikTok differ from those of other well-known social networking sites such as Instagram. TikTok has rebuilt the mechanics of this process with a design that leads users in a distinct direction than other social media platforms. While standard SNSs urge users to show themselves in different ways and through multiple channels, TikTok offers users to communicate with two alternative objects:

1. A trending algorithm recommends movies based on users' preferences and interests.
2. This produces a public display focusing on individuals rather than 'viewers'.

By Bhandari and Bimo (2020), this method of socialisation is known as the 'algorithmic self', and it is derived mostly from a reflective interaction with past representations of the self rather than one's social contacts. TikTok profoundly alters the notion of social networking. TikTok is a public performance site focused largely on human contact, which is achieved through content production and substantial engagement with personalized algorithms. Instead of engaging with the outside world via mechanical processes, people are compelled to negotiate their identities through self-engagement with "bots". "Bots" are carefully curated algorithms that display users' interests, personality, and identity, as well as the unique information they generate and process using TikTok's machines.

3.2.2 Dynamics of Viral Spread on TikTok

TikTok has been a fringe - or niche - social media product for a long time. However, TikTok's downloads on the AppStore and Google Play surpassed 1.5 billion in 2019 alone. In less than four years, the Chinese app has become a world's leading social media platforms, with has up to 800 million monthly users which are active, 150 millions of whom are "DOUYIN" from Asia. TikTok has become a recreational tool for teens, and its unique commenting and interaction features have become a major social media tool for them. Its unique commenting and interaction features have become one of the primary tools for the young to socialize, resulting in TikTok having a younger audience than any other platform. In order to grow as a content creator on TikTok, the content has to reach a substantial number of users. Posts which reach a certain number of views can reach "viral" status. This status means it spreads faster to the feeds of other users, increasing the potential audience reach, making it highly desirable for posts to reach this level. Since TikTok's "For you" page heavily favours creative content, influencers and other creators have to invest a lot of time and put a substantial amount of thought into videos, to be more prolific in the algorithm. This means that videos which receive millions of views diffuse information to an almost maximal audience reach potential (Sbai, 2021, pp.101-102).

When a topic or trend reaches a substantial enough size to become favoured by the governing algorithm, content related to it gets boosted significantly in audience-reachability. This further increases the content's presence across the platform, increasing the audience-reach and leading to a higher engagement-rate, which in turn increases the potential-viewership rate yet again. For content to proliferate at the highest level of efficiency, some sort of interaction between creator and viewer has to occur. Certain trends like political activism encourage content creator and user engagement, inspiring both parties to continue to spread and create material to a larger audience. In order for trends to reach this viral status, many diverse factors have to culminate. The platform, the format, content and audience- Creators engagement have to all be present in order for a post to reach viral status (Le Compte & Klug, 2021, p.2).

An emerging type of content which has received a lot of traction on the platform is news. Many young adults use TikTok as a premier news source. So much so, that about 49 percent of news have created TikTok accounts to in order to share overviews of news stories. The platform offers publishers a way to create non-traditional forms of news, which engage younger audiences and allow news agencies to connect to the target audience in a new way. In regard to news, the most common viral content is of the informational type, after that is humour-based content. (Cheng & Li, 2024, p.203)

There are certain techniques which can help a video achieve viral status. Keeping the flow information concise, using simple and straight-forward vernacular. Furthermore, it is important as a creator to stay open to discussion with the viewership. Specifically in the case of news, it has been shown to be more effective to focus on content which appeals to emotion instead of a dry fact-based approach. The attention on emotion-based content can lead to a more personable feeling for the viewer, making the viewer more likely to engage with the content. (Cheng & Li, 2024, p.204). While the presentation of the content is important, for many users it is not necessarily the defining factor. Certain user groups, for example teenage-to young adult female users prefer to watch content which is presented by content creators who are visually appealing, it is worth noting that the gender ratio of Tiktok's users in German-speaking countries is the opposite of the international trend,

with 2/3 of users in German-speaking countries being female (Sbai, 2021, p.101). Introducing new terminology, benefits, and modes of political communication, TikTok has swiftly evolved from a slang for 'kids these days' humour to a powerful political force with the potential to go viral 'beyond YouTube' as it has rapidly turned into one of the world's leading social networking networks. With more than 1 billion users, it has become a force to be reckoned with for political parties. In Germany, the 2021 election was a harbinger of things to come, with 2/3 of political associations coming to the platform to own an account. (Bösch, 2023, pp. 149-150).

Since TikTok is one of the leading platforms for content distribution, the platform faces its fair share of controversy. Due to the relatively young age of the platform, a lot of content which spreads virally isn't thoroughly moderated. Between 2018-2023 TikTok faced controversy for the platform hosting explicit and illegal material involving minors. This type of content forced TikTok to increase its manual moderation team. This is not the only criticism the platform had to endure, there are many other categories of morally dubious content present which achieved viral status. This includes drug-related content, terrorist recruitment ads and other content which falls under hate speech. Particularly extremist political content seems to spread far and wide on the platform. Whether from Islamic terror organization promoted content or far-right calls to violence, hateful content was able to spread unmoderated for the entire year of 2019 (Weimann & Masri, 2023, p. 756).

Unlike TikTok, "Douyin" (China's version of TikTok) content is vetted by both artificial intelligence and humans before it is officially posted on the platform, especially given the Chinese government's control over social media content, such as the content which involves political influence, national security, sexually explicit material, gambling, and strict controls on drugs. The Chinese government's control of social media content, such as political influence, national security, sexually explicit material, gambling, and strict drug control, makes Douyin's content "safer" for users, especially teenagers.

While there are privacy concerns regarding the platform. Many of the presented facts

apply industry wide. This means the accumulation of private user data. Every social-media platform can lead to an intrusion into privacy of the user. Most of these features can be disabled by the user and accumulated data, specifically on TikTok is coded specifically to be data-leak resistant. There are a multitude of reasons why TikTok is facing this much criticism from media and government agencies. A big reason is that the company is located in China and it threatens the market position of leading western companies on their own turf (Sibai, 2021, pp. 98-99). Another major part is that because the platform is still young and receives heaps of attention, leads to a sort of Streisand effect. The more scrutiny and attention are put on TikTok, the more visible the platform becomes in the eyes of users, leading to higher engagement.

A recent court case handled by the Eight Court of the European Union found that TikTok may operate as a gatekeeper in the EWR. Gatekeepers are platforms which can influence discourse among the public. In a sense, Gatekeepers function as digital public squares where people can interact and share ideas and opinions. The court findings indicate that some planned functions of TikTok violate guidelines which govern how Gatekeepers operate. This means that certain features on the central European version of TikTok are missing for the time being until the company can find ways to tweak these futures to be compliant with the law (Bytedance Ltd v. European Commission, 2024, n.p).

3.3 Customer Journey Analysis in TikTok User Behaviour

Customer journey as a term emerged within recent years to describe a specific process in which the customer gets led through the entire purchasing process tied in with an experience. The theory of customer journey is rooted within the study of customer experience, the journey emerges from the experience.

1. The customer journey is not a fixed process, it varies from person to person. However, each journey has set milestones. They are categorized as:
2. The Pre-purchase phase: this stage summarises the customers perspective on the process before engaging with the product. From the consideration to the product

search.

3. The purchase phase: This phase covers all interactions between the customer and the product. From viewing, to inquiring about it all the way to purchasing the item. This segment receives the most attention from brands, its importance may be overvalued when thinking about long-term CRM.

The final stage is the post-purchasing phase: By this point any stretch of time after the purchase is considered. The perspective the customer now has on the brand itself and how the customer interacts and engages in with it in the future is the focal point. This leads into customer loyalty (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p.76).

Journey and marketing are subcategories within the field of marketing. The field of research can be traced back into the 1960s. throughout the decades the accumulated knowledge developed into several distinct theories such as Customer-Relationship-Management (CRM), Customer-buying processing models etc. These theories are still in use to this day and many marketing strategies are largely based on them. Nowadays these processes are built within an overall strategy which is the customer journey. The process guides the client through all steps and "touchpoints". These touchpoints are indicators which mark actions, from product viewing, engagement all the way to purchase of product (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016, p.71). Customer Journey Mapping effectively displays the sequence of touchpoints that a consumer may encounter during the purchase process, allowing for a better understanding of a prospect's needs and concerns. Leveraging wants and concerns can impact consumer behaviour and improve the customer experience, resulting in higher conversion rates and customer loyalty (Ahrholdt et al, 2023, p.267).

Social media platforms offer easily accessible touchpoints, which influence the customers rate of content-engagement. Due to the nature of social media touchpoints, users keep returning to their platform of choice, which means that the rate of repeat product-engagement. Their unique attribute to connect users together presents new opportunities, which other traditional advertisement mediums don't possess. A point to mention is that data-analysis of the user to content engagement requires a broad range of raw-data.

Factors such as unique search function hits, number of distinct cookies, which indicate how often a user has visited the page. A further type of measurement, which should be involved in the analysis, is interactive data, which includes Likes, Shares, Views and Page Follows (Ahrholdt et al, 2023, pp.135-136).

3.3.1 Discovery and Initial Engagement

Customers use social media and engage with brands online primarily for two reasons: enjoyment and information seeking. Whereas the hedonistic goals of play, enjoyment, and fun are linked to information seeking, entertainment seeking is driven by the utilitarian objective of obtaining knowledge pertinent to consuming experiences and purchase decisions. The effect of entertaining versus informative content on consumer engagement depends on the different phases of the customer journey. In the pre-consumer phase, the consumer's main goal is to get information, so informational content is more likely to be positively evaluated and promote engagement. Entertaining content, on the other hand, may not fulfil information needs and instead reduce efficiency. In the consumption stage, information needs decrease and entertainment become important; entertaining content can enrich the consumer experience and promote interaction with the brand. Therefore, brands should provide appropriate informative and entertaining content according to the different phases of the customer journey. In the pre-consumption phase, informative content is prioritised; in the consumption stage, entertaining content can be added appropriately. In addition, the quality and originality of the content is important to attract consumers and increase engagement (Demmers et al, 2020, pp.57-58).

The three main phase of TikTok that drive the road to purchase are influencing each stage of the purchase, sustaining influence after the purchase and the “Joy-driven” model (TikTok for Business, 2022, n.p). What enables users to discover content is the platforms recommendation algorithm. This is primarily achieved through the “For you” function on TikTok. This page displays videos and hashtags to the user based upon the users search and watch habits. The “For you” page is the point of initial engagement between users, creators and brands. Besides the algorithm, influencers also play a major part of

promoting content to users. A final part of actively building a community with the audience is the ability of the creator to call for action. This means the creators themselves can dictate to their audience, to share and engage with content (Sbai, 2021, pp.101-102).

3.3.2 Interaction and Community Building

The content is the driving force for the interaction between user and eventual community building and maintaining interpersonal relationships and seeking enjoyment are key motives for engaging in online communities (Demmers et al, 2020, p.59). Using the appropriate video-format, presentation and well produced content can entice users to engage more with the material. Community posts and polls communicate directly to the user and lead to higher engagement rates in order to grow the amassed audience. According to TikTok's research, almost half of daily TikTok users want branded content to be engaging and entertaining. According to the report, TikTok users are 1.4 times more likely to believe that publishing on TikTok allows them to express creativity than users on other platforms (TikTok for Business, 2022, n.p). Although the platforms' functions do not directly encourage tight-knit community building, users tend to aggregate themselves around certain types of content or trends (such as challenges or the advancement of social goals via activism). The vast usage of health workers during the pandemic hints to professional communities centred around professions are starting to form on the platform (Kaye, Zeng & Wikstrom, 2022, p.93).

While many communities on TikTok can be organised under strict content genre categories, many others are compiled under current trends, creator fanbases which overlap. Within niche communities, users tend to fraternize heavily with each other and stay in constant communication, making the small group of users feel familiar with each other. These communities stretch across various factors such as geographical, cultural and linguistic boundaries (Kaye, Zeng & Wikstrom, 2022, p.107).

Influencers can use the feature of a private group chat, in which the influencer can directly communicate with their followers in a rapid fashion. The chat allows for followers to respond and communicate with others and the influencer in real time. This allows for

immediate feedback and encourages the followers to engage more with community (Ables & Hassen, 2024, n.p.).

In China, TikTok has become the predominant way of communication for Gen Alpha. A majority of Gen Alpha users use TikTok for chat functions with a rate higher than even WeChat. For many Gen Alpha users the only reason they still use WeChat is due to the fact that TikTok doesn't provide telecommunication functions.

3.3.3 TikTok's Infinite Loop

TikTok in 2022 presents the "Infinite Loop" model to introduce TikTok's unique retail purchase pathway. In the world of developing communities, shopping and entertainment, the traditional marketing funnel no longer works, and funnels often lead to one-off purchases that don't help brands build lasting, meaningful relationships with consumers. Consumer's buying steps are no longer travelling from the top of the funnel to the bottom. Instead, customers enter, exit, and re-enter at different points of the customer journey, depending on their requirements and aspirations (TikTok for Business, 2022, n.p).



Figure 1: Screen shot of TikTok's Infinite loop form TikTok for Business. Source: <https://www.tiktok.com/business/en-US/blog/infinite-loop-tiktok-retail-path-to-purchase?redirected=1>, accessed on Jun 29, 2024.

TikTok puts the power in the hands of the user, building a customer journey around their behaviours as "readers and doers". It's an infinite loop with no beginning or end, focuses on ongoing engagement and touchpoints such as *Organic content; Recommendations*

from friends, family and creators; Paid ads with customers, and it enables brands to build more substantial connections with customers, leading to communities of brand loyalists, repeat purchases and more consumption (TikTok for Business, 2022, n.p).

The Infinity Loop model as presented here cannot be implemented in its current shape into the EWR-Region due to Byte dance's delay decision of TikTok shop onboarding plan (Huang, 2024, n.p.). The necessary logistics and legal procedures have not been worked out yet. However, due to livestreaming already being a huge part of TikTok's content consumption in the DACH-Region, it is likely that the Infinity Loop model or one adjusted will have a large impact here as well. The Infinity Model offers users vast possibilities for touch points along their customer journey, users in the DACH-area do not have this option. Specifically, in Austria where direct purchasing is not yet possible on the platform, the only way for users to be guided along their customer journey is through the viewing and engagement with ads.

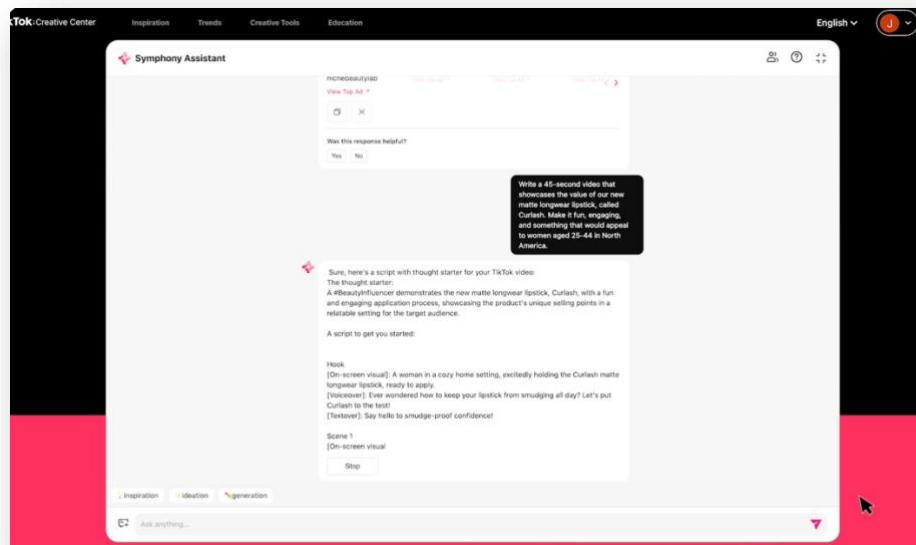


Figure 2: Screen shot of TikTok's Symphony Assistant from TikTok's Symphony for Business. Source: <https://www.tiktok.com/business/en/blog/tiktok-symphony-ai-creative-suite?redirected=1>, accessed on Aug 15, 2024.

And TikTok also offers TikTok's Symphony, an assistant enables producers to rapidly expand their multimedia portfolio. Symphony Assistant, a free AI tool supplied by TikTok, searches TikTok's full database to automatically figure out what's hot on TikTok right now, assists in developing video scripts and content, and offers features such as

acceptable hashtag options and suggested posting timings. Symphony's suite of creative innovations that easily integrate into the TikTok Ad Manager process enable creators/companies/brand marketers etc, to realise the full potential of TikTok's ad campaign. AI-driven ad production can help to streamline the process and improve results. TikTok Symphony Assistant enhances the consumer experience by ensuring that information is relevant and engaging. It uses AI to analyse user preferences and behaviour, allowing brands to contact their target audience more efficiently. Conversion rates can be increased by using content that connects with users, which increases brand-user interaction, fosters stronger relationships, encourages users to spend more time interacting with content, and assists potential customers in discovering the products and services that they are most likely to purchase. Meanwhile, content distribution is constantly adjusted in response to changes in user behaviour and preferences, driving repeat interactions, increasing brand loyalty, and improving the entire consumer experience (TikTok for Business, 2024, n.p).

4 E-commerce Integration of cross-platform on TikTok

In digital marketing, understanding consumer habits on TikTok has become crucial for tech-adjacent brands aiming to capture the attention of Generation Z. This section delves into the various aspects of e-commerce integration on TikTok, exploring how the platform influences purchase decisions and fosters brand engagement and user loyalty. This chapter includes an in-depth look on how Rich- and Lean-Media are used on social platforms. The focus lying on TikTok's integration of Rich-Media, especially in regard to TikTok's "live-shopping" features, where users can purchase products directly through a livestream.

4.1 E-commerce Integration on TikTok

A popular method to integrate e-commerce on TikTok is the method of live stream selling. The concept shares many similarities to the TV-Shopping of the 1980s. In where a Host presents products in a pre-recorded broadcast. In these broadcasts, viewers have the opportunity to call the number shown on screen to initiate a purchase. While in live-streams users can click on a link to access the online shop. This practice falls under the "social shopping" term, in which the audience is supposed to build an emotional connection to the presenter. The presenter informs the users about the offered products features while engaging the viewers with relatable appearance. Many of the offered products are heavily discounted, further attempting to engage the audience to access the online shop (Wu et al, 2023, p.4).

Since direct selling is not currently available on TikTok, clicking a provided link will send the user to the platform external official online store of a brand. The existence of the live streams themselves don't show any significant boost to the purchase intention of the user. Therefore, the products are being presented in an engaging way, while also having the products uniqueness or advantages highlighted by the presenter. A factor which boosts the buying factor of the user is the relative ease of access the user has to the product while viewing the live stream. Specifically, the addition of sharing and comment features give the user more ways of gathering information of the presented products. All these factors

combine and increase purchase intent on the platform. Interactivity to the stream and content engagement are the key factors in maximising user purchase intent on TikTok.

TikTok Live Shopping is a feature on the platform, which is supposed to offer a seamless shopping experience to the user. The service is built upon a range of features such as the shopping cart option, which allows users to mark items of interest and the ability to buy multiples products at the same time. A further design feature are product catalogues, in essence it's an amalgamation of links referring to different websites or apps. These features intend to use TikTok's massive user base to boost product visibility during Live Shopping streams. TikTok Live Shopping is not only supported by individual users but many collaborations with e-commerce entities. What makes the Live Shopping so favourable to TikTok is that all transactions can stay contained within the platforms bounds. This is the case for almost all of TikTok's presence in western markets, including the southeast-Asian sphere. The only exception for this is the EU-sphere, where direct shopping still isn't available to the user base, Within the EU, users still have to jump to external platforms in order to purchase products. The original plan was for TikTok to launch this feature in the EWR in July of 2024. The platform ultimately decided to delay the implementation and focus its efforts to entrench itself within the US-Market. Where a large part of its revenue in TikTok Live Shopping stems from. Another potential reason is TikTok's desire to establish itself as a mainstay for e-commerce in the US, amidst the political pressure the platform faces, which could lead to a ban of TikTok in the USA. The delay of the launch allows TikTok to circumvent more regulation and legalese in the EWR (Huang, 2024, n.p.).

4.2 Influence of TikTok on Purchase Decision

Specifically, the addition of sharing and comment features give the user more ways of gathering information of the presented products. All these factors combine and increase purchase intent on the platform. Interactivity to the stream and content engagement are the key factors in maximizing user purchase intent on TikTok. Users feel that gathering and accessing information is easy on TikTok, the users are more willing to follow current

trends and interact with a multitude of campaigns. Due to the fast and wide range of information a user can gather on a product, consumers feel that TikTok is a convenient platform to shop (Martini et al, 2022, p. 175).

Since TikTok does not yet have a direct sales function, TikTok adverts provide a link to a shopping site, which allows users to access the brand's official online shop outside of the platform. The existence of the live streams themselves don't show any significant boost to the purchase intention of the user. Therefore, the products are being presented in an engaging way, while also having the products uniqueness or advantages highlighted by the presenter. A factor which boosts the buying factor of the user is the relative ease of access the user has to the product while viewing the live stream. Specifically, the addition of sharing and comment features give the user more ways of gathering information of the presented products. All these factors combine and increase purchase intent on the platform. Interactivity to the stream and content engagement are the key factors in maximising user purchase intent on TikTok (Martini et al, 2022, pp. 178-179).

Due to the volatile nature of the "For You" recommendation algorithm, the reach of an influence can vary dramatically, which they can accumulate a massive following instantly or over a longer period of time. This makes business seeking marketing opportunities rely on a multitude of content promotion through methods such as brand integration, influencer marketing and various platform labor (creation of content and various other usage of functions). A way creators can monetize their content is through "Gifts" a monetary token, which can be bought with money. These gifts are stored in a TikTok Wallet. However, to note is that TikTok cuts 50 percent of the monetary value the creator receives. The tokens come in a variety of forms, such as "Gifts", "Coins" and "Diamonds". The only differentiating factor between these monetary tokens is the amount and way money gets transferred with one party to the other. Only creators with a certain number of followers can make use of this feature and users under the age of majority are prohibited from accessing this feature. While donation-based payment methods are a central component of TikTok's revenue generating model, another way business is conducted on the platform is through the method "influencer marketing". This is where brands and

businesses employ the service of a established creator with a large userbase to promote a product or service. There is not set formular which dictates the price of hire. The price can range dramatically depending on the size of audience (Kaye, Zeng & Wikstrom, 2022, pp.148-153).

Increased buying decisions are tied to increased consumer demand and sales. Content marketing has a huge and positive influence on procurement choices, especially via social channels like TikTok. Creation & distribution of content, partnerships, community growth, and e-word of mouth are influences on purchase decisions. Content creation, sharing, relationship building, and community growth all have an impact on customer purchase decisions. Electronic word-of-mouth, including comments, reviews, user-produced films, and ideas, has a significant direct influence on buying decisions (Ijan & Ellyawati, 2023, p.95)

4.3 Brand Engagement and User Loyalty on TikTok

Many companies, institutions and brands use the platform to advertise and promote their brand image and build communities. This trend has only increased in recent years where brands and companies open their official TikTok accounts in the DACH-Region under the “Pro” feature. The “Pro” feature allows users to take an in depth look at statistics, audience reach and engagement. Some official store profiles only have their account on TikTok but rely on user content to spread their reach and only seldom post content themselves. Most brand activity on TikTok concerns itself with advertisement, challenges, influencer cooperation or user-based input. In regard to advertisement, the influencer-cooperation is rather straightforward, it functions almost identical to other social media platforms, the only difference is that TikTok can be incentivised to promote the cooperation as a service to paying companies. TikTok allows brands to post ad-campaigns themselves. In regard to challenges, this category is overlapping with influencer cooperation. Here brands have the option of paying TikTok to play the part of the marketer instead of the brand conducting an ad-campaign. Naturally, the brands can post self-produced content, which is the most often used method to promote their products or services. To note is however

that without a direct cooperation with the platform or established influencers, brands don't receive any extra boost in the algorithm and must get their content viral naturally. Many employees of said brands tend to engage in trends or challenges in order to promote the brand-image on the platform and to further audience-reach (Beilharz, 2022, p.495-496). In the DACH-region of Europe, many companies have their official account on TikTok. The companies are distributed among distributed among a large scale of different industries, such as fashion, household products, media conglomerates and industrial goods. Market leading companies and institutions such as Bipa, DM, Red Bull, Zalando, telecommunications E.g. Drei, news agencies like Krone, Öe24, Der Standard and institutions E.g. ÖAMTC and ÖBB, governmental E.g. "Stadt Wien" etc. all can be found on the platform.

The success of marketing campaigns on TikTok also consider a multitude range of factors, these can range from cultural, socio-economical all the way to psychological factors. Due to the market saturation of marketers on TikTok, being able to stand out from the competition is key to influence the purchase decision of a user. (Martini et al, 2022, p. 170). Many brands verified official accounts (With blue checkmark, see in XXX) use the cross-platform integration function on TikTok. This function allows immediate referral to alternative social media sites like Instagram. Here we use BIPA official account as an example:



Figure 3: Bipa's official TikTok account page (screen shot from TikTok App)

In these above images, we can see the integration of TikTok's cross-platform functionality. Users can instantly jump to the brand's Instagram page, the brand's event page, and the brand's official website via brand's TikTok homepage. Another interesting feature to note is that TikTok offers functionality that allows users to jump directly to the Apple App Store or Google play Store through brand's official page to download the brand's App. This series of integrations gives a very convenient approach to the company's brand management as well as user loyalty management. Users can also provide links to Douyin (China's version of TikTok), which allows viewers to jump to Douyin via the provided link, this presents a different path with opportunities for brand management as well.

In the brand's video can also be provided according to different content can be given to different links, for example, video content is about brand promotion or brand story is, the link is mostly directly to the brand's official website homepage, and when the video content is about a product or an event, it can be directly to the jump to the product sales page or the event introduction/registration page. The image below is an example of the ZALANDO official TikTok account:

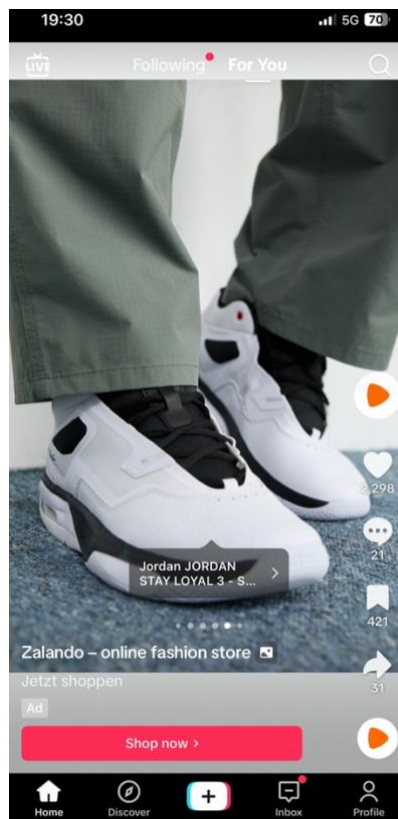


Figure 4: screen shot of a Zanlando's Ads (screen shot from TikTok App)

The case of TikTok is a special one, since it is defined heavily by its user base, which is Gen Z. The platform follows the goal to increase the hedonistic or utilitarian pleasure of its users in order to promote constant brand engagement. The endless stream of interest related content tries to persuade the user from a passive content consumer to an active one. An active user is much more likely to engage with promotional material and on average is the type of user with the highest degree of brand engagement. The various features of TikTok are designed to appeal to the psychology of the user. In a sense, these features cultivate positive feedback from the user and in turn leads to a higher engagement rate. This premise is highly appealing to brands and companies. If these brands use the features effectively can lead to the user becoming a return customer and even contribute to community building. The psychological aspect of validation plays a major role in building a community among users. The instant feedback allows for others to share their perspective on a certain topic. Effective messaging combined with engaging content can deeply affect a user's purchase intent. Among Gen Z users there is an overarching perspective on advertisement on the platform, most users find the idea of intrusive ad-campaigns to be negative, it is of the highest importance to subtly weave advertisement into overall content (Ortiz et al, 2023, p.544).

4.3.1 Algorithm of TikTok

Some researchers have argued that algorithms do not directly assist users in achieving useful goals on online or SNSs; instead, algorithms are designed to give satisfaction to users by allowing them to engage with the interface. AI makes it easier for people to create and share content on social media platforms by providing tools for video and music editing, as well as filters. Content consumption, content creation, and online communication are the primary functions of social media. In reality, the implementation of AI algorithms has changed these critical domains. In terms of content consumption, social media algorithms have the ability to push personalized news and information depending on users' choices and interests in online activities. (Kang & Lou, 2022, p.4).

The TikTok's algorithm which the recommendation of content to the user is based upon

four basic values. These include “user value, “long/term user value”. “Creator value” and “platform value”. These values are influenced by factors such as how long a user watches a video. The type of videos the user likes, shares and comments on. The major factors which influence the algorithm are the metrics “retention” and “time spent”. Both of these metrics deal with the average watch length of a video and how many times a user returns to a creator's content (Smith, 2021, n.p). TikTok uses algorithms techniques for processing natural languages to recognize text and audio components. (e.g., sound) in popular videos, computer vision to categorize the visual components, and subject tags and subtitles (Kang & Lou, 2022, p.4).

TikTok's recommendation algorithm “For You” tracks and measures user engagement metrics, and the more data it collects, the more accurate the recommendations users receive. The algorithm considers, user behaviors, video characteristics and the device setting such as languages and locations. These effect of user’s daily interactions into three perspectives: content discovery, personalization and spreadability. while browsing the “For You” page the discovery of content takes on a passive role. The recommendation algorithm displays limitless content which allows the user to engage with, depending on the criteria mentioned before, the discovery of content relies primarily on the algorithm and secondly takes search results into account (Kaye, Zeng & Wikstrom, 2022, pp.58-59).

There are other functions which allow the user themselves to filter content to their liking. This means the user can manually choose keywords, such as “travel” to receive more content within that niche. Compared to other social media and short video platforms, TikTok's algorithm is influenced by first interaction more easily. This means that what a new account watches first dictates most of the content the user will see in the future. To note is that this would only be the case if the user would not like, comment or share videos and manually filter categories. There is a lot of concern among KOL that the nature of the algorithm could lead users, especially younger ones down dangerous rabbit holes, such as conspiratorial politically extremist content and adjacent content stretching the terms of service. The platform faces criticism due to the perception of a too lax stance on content moderation, specifically in regard to political propaganda which appears on the platform.

(Taylor, 2024, n.p).

Considering the overall functions, it can be said that The TikTok algorithm works by analysing user interactions, such as likes, shares, comments, and watch time, to tailor a personalized feed on the “For You” page. It uses machine learning to understand user preferences, compounding copious amounts of data from videos watched and interactions to suggest similar content. The algorithm also considers video information, including captions, hashtags, and sounds, along with device and account settings. All these factors compile together to create an appropriation of the user personality, what the user likes, dislikes and what content the user most likely will engage with and to incentive the user to keep engaging with the platform (Kang & Lou, 2022, p.4).

4.3.2 Ads Type on Social Media

On Social media platforms there is predominately two types of marketing. One of them is social media marketing in general, which included: content marketing, influencer marketing, PR, affiliate marketing etc. and there is internal search engine optimisation as well. The most traditional way of online marketing is the classic commercial. Commercials come in many forms. From banners, pop-ups, text links all the way to the prominent video-ads. Banners are the simplest form of advertisement; in essence a sizeable chunk of the opened page contains the commercial. Pop-ups as the name implies are ads which appear superimposed on Infront of the viewed page. These are not highly regarded since they be a nuisance and take away from the user experience due to manually having to be closed. Text links serve the function of linking the user to where he can engage with the product or service. Video ads on the other hand appear while either clicking on an embedded video or during watch time. Falling under a separate more specialised category is keyword-marketing. Here specific words or phrases are used to potentially reach a broader audience (Kreutzer, 2018, pp.617-619).

When it comes to TikTok in particular, there are two basic paths for a business to conduct advertisement. The business either has to self-publish on the platform or consult TikTok directly via a booked partner. If a booked partnership approach has been chosen then the

brand can decide which types of add strategies should be employed. This includes Brand Takeover, In-Feed-Ads, -Branded, Hashtag-Challenge, Branded Effects, Custom Influencer and Top view.

These strategies are designed to boost potential audience reach and presence in the recommendation algorithm. The brand takeover format allows for pictures or .gif files to be displayed Fullscreen. It can generate links to other sites, e.g. a store page. The Top-View format functions similarly, the only major difference is that instead of a single picture or .gif file being portrayed, it's a full video file. With In-Feed ads, the advertisement will be played between a user's watch session, when the user scrolls through a few videos. In regard to Branded Effects, custom visual effects which can be layered on top of a video. This feature stands in conjunction with the challenge format, in which the user has to upload the video with a hashtag which includes the name of the campaign + the word challenge. Last is the Custom Influencer strategy, where the brand partners with an influencer on the platform and the influencer promotes the product or service, these advertisements are marked with the label "official", so that the user is aware of the campaign. (Beilharz, 2022, p. 501)

For a brand to effectively market on the platform TikTok it is vital to understand the target audience, which in this case is typically younger. There is a unique user culture and language on the platform, which is important to understand and learn to effectively communicate to the potential customers. Using all potential avenues to market the content helps achieve a potentially higher audience reach, this includes using cross-platform integration features to link to other social media platforms. The brand can employ the TikTok Creator Marketplace to find the fitting Influencer for the campaign. The Creator Marketplace allows to filter by Location, Audience-Reach and Genre. To note is however the platform relies on heavy engagement, this means the brand would be best to engage with trends and challenges themselves too, in order to further connect to the target audience. Last to mention is that TikTok offers statistics in order to gauge current audience engagement and retention. (Beilharz, 2022, pp.504-505).

5 Comparative Analysis across Platforms

This focus of this chapter is on comparing the variances in user behaviour on different social media platforms. How the attributes of each platform influence a user's customer journey. The primary focus lies still on TikTok, where the average behaviour of users is juxtaposed to the user behaviour and customer journeys on adjacent platforms.

5.1 Differences of User Behaviour across Platforms

Users disseminate and share material on a constant basis via different platforms. This constant creation of content and engagement leads to a feed-back loop where more material is created and therefore shared. The ability to share material cross-platform further boosts the virality of material. The characteristics of each platform reflect the differences in general user activity (Ham et al, 2019, p.158). Research conducted by Ham et al. suggests that the overall output by users generally do not deviate too drastically based on which platform they use. Rather, the largest difference-maker is the individual. However, a factor to note is that the platforms model of how content is shared dictates how it is perceived (Ham et al, 2019, p.172).

5.2 Comparative Studies in Social Media Research towards TikTok

TikTok and Instagram are leading platforms in the sphere of online marketing. As their positions as market leaders on social media platforms, many brands and marketers use their vast userbase as a base to advertise. What elevates these platforms as fertile ground for advertising is that brands can grow their following whilst also marketing their products. Almost any product or service can be advertised for on social media. Most users fall within the 18–34-year-old age range. This spectrum makes up about 2/3rds of the entire user base. Since social networking has become an essential part of many of these users' daily lives, it enables brands to market intensively towards the desired target demographic. A further point to acknowledge is that these platforms tailor their algorithms specifically to the needs and interests of the users, enabling potentially a more prevalent appearance of brands on their feed (Torres-Toukoumidis et al, 2021, pp.21-22).

Currently Instagram boasts about a billion active users. The platform hosts the predominant influencer sphere. The influencers who are active on the platform use the story and reels in tandem to promote products or services. The categories range all the way from travel to beauty and so on. One downside to the visually presented medium is that products which are not visibly appealing on average don't find a proper audience. However, a unique feature of Instagram is that it is inherently very marketer friendly. The site offers tools which give in depth analyses of actual audience reach, viewer engagement and profile views. Stories offer the inclusion of external links, for example the ability to embed an online-store link within a story, however this feature is only available for users who accumulated over 10000 followers. (Jahnke, 2021, pp.80-81).

TikTok has overtaken Instagram in terms of growth of user base, it achieved the same rate of growth in three years as Instagram did in twice that amount of time. The advanced algorithms moderate unwanted explicit and undesirable content, whilst promoting ad-based campaigns. An enormous advantage this platform possesses is that they are inherently supranational entities. This means brands have the opportunity to promote their products and services in a cross-border environment (Torres-Toukoumidis et al, 2021, pp.30-31).

TikTok boasts about 800 million active users by month. Compared to other platform, it has the on average much younger user base, from teens spanning to young adults in the age range of 13-24. Most of the user base can be categorized within Gen Z. The overall content differentiates itself as well, focusing more on comedy-skits, Trick-videos and Challenges. These challenges offer elements of gamification which marketers can use to their advantage. Influencers who use the platform are themselves called "TikTokers". They can promote products while engaging in challenges, which can make followers see these products in a trendy association. Music plays a significant part in the overall content creation. A lot of music can be pre-integrated into short videos. TikTok's KPIs pertain to Likes, Shares, Comments, Hashtags and Mentions. Compared to Instagram, Text based mediums don't play a part on TikTok, the audio-visual medium plays a much more major role within content creation (Jahnke, 2021, pp.82-83).

YouTube on the other hand is the oldest among these services. It has around 2 billion active users per month. What separates YouTube from TikTok and Instagram is that the degree of professionalism which influencers conduct themselves with. Since YouTube videos don't have a time-restriction for its length, long format advertisement is possible. Content substance can range through every possible category. Because YouTube belongs to Google, it offers the highest SEO potential. Google searches boost the presence of YouTube on the search feed. This enables influencers to engage in cross-channel promoting more efficiently. Compared to TikTok and Instagram, YouTube combines, Short and Long-video formats with text-based elements. On the other hand, YouTube does not offer the ability to integrate links to other social media sites (Held, 2021, pp.84-85).

5.3 Comparative Analysis of Customer Journeys across Platforms

In modern digital environments, the behavioural characteristics of Gen Z consumers have significantly influenced companies' marketing strategies. Gen Z communicates and shops mainly digitally, focuses on personalisation, authenticity and social responsibility, and is good at comparing and sharing.

YouTube is an important platform for companies to reach Gen Z with its large user base and high engagement. Its strengths include support for multiple video formats and ad formats. However, it is costly to produce and manage a company channel, and the user's attention span might be limited. To address these characteristics, companies should create high-quality, entertaining content and partner with influencers. TrueView video ads and bumper ads are effective forms of placement that can capture users' attention and increase brand exposure (Kleinjohann & Reinecke, 2020, pp.35-36). Given that YouTube videos are lengthier and consequently contain more information than TikTok videos, audiences may learn more about a particular product during the pre-purchase phase. Both YouTube and TikTok provide helpful marketing tools for consumers, particularly when it comes to the pre-purchase phase of the consumer lifecycle. By closely examining the digital influencers on these social media networks, marketers and brand managers can identify opportunities to engage, connect, and market their brands to Generation Z consumers at

this critical juncture. TikTokers may be utilized in brief films with one or two key statements about a business or product, while YouTubers can be used to create more informative marketing materials (Silveira et al, 2023, p.390).

Separate from YouTube, Instagram's strength lies in the fact that visual content is highly communicative and supports a variety of interactive features. Businesses can engage their target groups by posting images and video content on a regular basis and use Instagram stories to distribute company news and product information. However, Instagram content requires frequent updates which users can regularly interact with. Similar to YouTube, a collaboration with Instagram influencers for product demonstrations and offers can enhance brand presence and user engagement. Unlike the previously mentioned platforms, TikTok has become a new favourite for enterprise marketing with its rapidly growing user base and strong interactivity. Businesses can grab users' attention by posting short video content, participating in trending topics and hashtag challenges. TikTok's video content is required to be shorter and more creative, which means businesses need to constantly innovate their content formats. Still maintaining a partnering with influencers on TikTok and placing feed video ads can effectively increase brand awareness and user engagement not unlike YouTube and Instagram (Kleinjohann & Reinecke, 2020, pp.35-37).

YouTube only allows users to post single comments and discussions, whereas TikTok and Instagram allow users to interact by sending messages directly to influencers or their followers, initiating group chats; however, TikTok restricts the sending of messages only to friends (people the user follows and those who follow them) to avoid spamming the account. It is clear that due to the high flexibility of user interaction on TikTok and Instagram, it is easier for brands or influencers to build and manage a fan base by allowing them to interact directly with their followers. The different levels of flexibility in user interaction across platforms indirectly affects the willingness of users to use different platforms, resulting in different user groups and user behaviours. TikTok offers every individual to become recognized, and the platform has minimal barriers to entry for creators. Users feel that gathering and accessing information is easy on TikTok, the users are more willing to follow current trends and interact with a multitude of campaigns. Due

to the fast and wide range of information a user can gather on a product, consumers feel that TikTok is a convenient platform to shop (Martini et al, 2022, p. 175). On sites such as Instagram and YouTube, it takes time for individuals to build up followers before their videos are picked up by recommendation engines. TikTok gives every video an equal chance of being seen. It is initially shown to a small audience before gaining popularity. If the video becomes viral immediately, the creator stands to get a lot of traffic and attention, even if they don't have any followers to begin with (Mhalla et al, 2020, p.13).

As mentioned in 4.1.2, TikTok offers the ability to jump across platforms, not just branded websites, but across different social platforms. While Instagram and YouTube also provide a jump function, it is limited to jumping to a website page or downloading an app through an advertisement but does not provide a more convenient social platform jump function for brands or users. This difference distances TikTok's user behaviour and purchasing habits from those of other video platforms and creates more touchpoints in TikTok's users' customer journeys.

6 Procedure and Methodology

In particular, this chapter explains how focus group discussions were used in this study, going into detail of the attributes of various methodologies and how the chosen approach was selected. An explanation of the focus group method and a deep dive into the various aspects of the focus group. This includes the preparation for the group interview with the guideline and questions.

6.1 Chosen approach

The purpose of this research is to figure out the behaviour and consumption habits of TikTok users in Austria and to compare how they differ on other mainstream short-form video e.g. Instagram and YouTube, as well as to explore the uniqueness of TikTok users in Austria compared to other mainstream short-form video platforms.

For this purpose, it is necessary to collect various in-depth ideas about users' subjective preferences, attitudes, opinions and needs. Therefore, a qualitative survey methodology is required. Qualitative surveys are an offshoot of qualitative survey methods and are mainly used for exploratory surveys. This can provide a good opportunity to discover the attitudes and ideas of the participants. Quantitative survey methods are less compatible with research objectives than qualitative survey methods. The advantage of quantitative survey methods is that they can provide a large amount of descriptive data that objectively reflects a certain fact. However, this is not required by the research objectives of this thesis (Baur & Blasius, 2019, pp.8-9).

Among the qualitative research methods, representative methods include expert interviews and focus groups. Expert interviews are conducted with people who have expertise in a particular field, and detailed information on a specific topic can be obtained through expert interviews. Expert interviews are very useful if there is insufficient literature in a certain field of study. However, since expert interviews are conducted individually, some insights that can only be gained through interaction may be lost (Helfferich, 2019, pp.670-671).

Focus groups are a research method used to gather ideas and opinions about a concept, service or product, conducted by multiple participants simultaneously. Participants in the study need to be carefully selected to accurately reflect the broader population they are attempting to represent, exploring and understanding different aspects of user behaviour and consumption patterns on TikTok compare to other prominent social media platforms (Fleetwood, 2023, n.p.).

Focus groups offer several advantages, not the least of which is the ability to conduct exploratory research quickly and efficiently. Because their interactive style encourages lively debate, researchers can effectively uncover subtle insights (Morgan, 1996, p. 132). On the other hand, participants from different backgrounds can also interact with each other to further think about the topic and then come up with new ideas. This is very helpful in achieving the research objectives. Focus groups have a great advantage in capturing the preferences, attitudes, opinions and needs of the target group. Participants can inspire each other and come up with new ideas. It is easier to obtain in-depth information in a relaxed environment. It is these advantages that are needed for research questions, making focus groups the most appropriate research method (Vogl, 2014, pp.583-584). However, it can be difficult and challenging to find advocates for the target audience. In addition, a major disadvantage of focus groups is their inherently small sample size, which may not adequately reflect the complexity and diversity of the broader target audience (Morgan, 1996, p. 132).

6.2 Concept of Focus group

6.2.1 Introduction of Focus group

A focus group is a discussion centred on a certain topic or product. Focus groups typically consist of 6-10 people who engage in an in-depth conversation about a topic or idea under the instruction of a moderator. The number of participants in focus groups is determined by the number of comparisons wanted, the study topic, the type of data gathered, and the analysis requested. The purpose of focus groups is to understand what is audience's thoughts and why. The survey's major feature is that it allows participants to engage in a

thorough and extensive debate about the issue. The goal of the study is to learn about the target audience's opinions, insights, experiences, and so on regarding a specific topic or product. Focus groups, due to participant interaction, are closer to the genuine conversational state than solo interviews. Focus groups are a better path to collect individual and group perspectives. The most significant feature of a focus group is that the conversation will include more than one member. Participants' perspectives may shift as they connect with other participants, but they will consider the issue more deeply. Participants' opinions will interact with one another. This will produce significantly different outcomes than individual interviews. This contact is critical to the effectiveness of focus groups. Because participants may communicate, focus groups frequently yield more detailed results than solo interviews. One person's reactions motivate others, allowing for subject interaction to be monitored, which yields more information than the same number of persons speaking separately. On the one hand, participants in a focus group will inspire one another, broadening the scope of what is discussed, and the researcher will be able to acquire a more diverse variety of viewpoints, ideas, and suggestions. On the other hand, some people may keep their opinion to themselves because their opinions vary too drastically from those of other participants and it could become a source of conflict, or because their points of view are insufficiently convincing. As a result, researchers must exercise extreme caution when producing reports and relying on focus group findings. (Vogl, 2014, pp.583-584).

6.2.2 The Moderator and Guideline

In addition to the participants, the moderator plays a very important role in the focus group. The moderator is essential to the successful implementation of a focus group. The moderator must be a quick witted and be able to handle unexpected turns in the discussion. At the same time, the moderator must be forthcoming and courteous in guiding the direction of the discussion, listening to and accepting the views of the participants rather than over-explaining or refuting, and giving hints when necessary, so that the participants can better understand the questions. In principle, the facilitator should minimise his/her involvement in the discussion. Of course, it is very important to be familiar with the whole

discussion process. The facilitator is responsible for conducting the focus group (Vogl, 2014, pp.584-585; Halkier, 2010, p.72). And a guideline based on the research concept can help the moderator to better conduct the focus group. The guide should describe the overall framework themes and outstanding issues so that focus group participants can discuss certain points in detail. The guide only provides a framework. Facilitators should not rely too much on the guideline and need to be flexible in the discussion according to the actual situation. The different stages of the group dynamics should be considered when defining the guide. Provocative topics and remarks are also needed to help participants engage in controversial discussions (Vogl, 2014 pp.584-585).

6.3 Implementation of the focus group

The implementation process of the focus group in the research is described in the following chapters.

Time	Phase
2024.06.01 – 2024.07.26	Preparation of focus group
2024.07.27	Conducting the group discussion
2024.07.28 – 2024.08.18	Evaluation and analysis of content
2024.08.18 – 2024.08.25	Answering the research questions

Table 1 Timeline for focus group (own created)

6.3.1 Preparation of the focus groups

At this stage, a guideline was first created based on the literature and the research objectives. The full guide can be found in the appendix. Participants were then recruited. This thesis focuses on the behaviour and consumption habits of Austrian TikTok users, therefore the selection of respondents focused on active TikTok users between the ages of 18 and 35 in Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland. According to the official data of the TikTok platform as of 24 October 2023, the total number of Austrian users reached 2.01 million (TikTok, 2023, n.p.). The gender distribution of users was roughly balanced, with

53% female users and 47% male users (Statista Consumer Insights, 2023, n.p.) The researcher posted information about recruiting participants through social media channels. In the end, seven participants from three different Austrian provinces were selected.

	Gender	Age	Location
P1	F	In 20's	Vienna
P2	F	25	Lower Austria
P3	F	24	Burgenland
P4	F	18	Burgenland
P5	M	25	Lower Austria
P6	M	31	Vienna
P7	M	27	Lower Austria

Table 2 Information about participants P1 – P7

The table above shows some basic information about the participants. The focus group participants were anonymous. P1 to P7 were used to identify the participants.

The participants could not meet simultaneously at a fixed location due to personal reasons, so the focus group agreed to a video conference as a solution. The platform Google Meet was chosen as the medium for the focus group discussions, considering the difficulty of smooth operation, video quality, audio quality, and other factors. This allowed for better identification of participants in the transcription. The focus group discussion was held on 2024, Jul. 27 in an online meeting after coordinating the participants' schedules.

6.3.2 Conducting the group discussion

The focus group discussion took place on 27 July 2024. In the initial stages of the discussion, there was relatively little interaction amongst the participants, who basically answered the questions with low enthusiasm, which could be attributed to the fact that the interviewees were unfamiliar with each other. Fortunately, detailed instructions were helpful, and the facilitator was able to mobilise the participants by way of a slightly longer introduction and simple driven responses. Participants quickly became interested in the topic and all participants actively participated in the discussion and expressed their views.

The discussion lasted for 100 minutes and many interesting ideas and directions emerged during the discussion.

The focus group discussion was broadly divided into the following sections:

1. Welcome and introduction of the whole discussion by the moderator.
2. Personal introductions and warm-up question
3. Segment 1: General Usage of Social media platform:
 - Commonly used social media
 - Engagement and Interaction
 - Personal Experience and Perceptions
4. 15-minute intermission.
5. Block 2: Detailed analysis of the research question:
 - Ad Awareness & Engagement
 - Consumer Behaviour
 - Ad Content and Style
 - Perception of Ads & Relevance and Personalisation
 - Content improvement & Platform Development
6. Moderator asks participants if they have any further questions.
7. Closing the discussion

In (1), the moderator welcomed the participants and explained the rules of the focus group in detail. After briefly explaining the content of the focus group discussion, proceed to (2) to guide participants to introduce themselves and familiarise them with each other through warm-up questions.

Segment 1(3) dealt with the habits of TikTok users in using social media in their daily lives. Frequently used social media, engagement and interaction in social media and participants' personal experiences and perceptions of using social media were discussed. During this time, comparisons between TikTok and other platforms were also emphasised and discussed.

After discussing the General Usage of Social media platform, the Moderator decided to

take a short 15-minute break as the participants were already showing fatigue with the discussion. It is interesting to note that after the moderator informed the participants that the recording had been paused, the participants started talking again a few minutes later and the atmosphere was very laid-back.

After a short break (4) the discussion in segment 2 (5) started, i.e. the detailed analysis of the research question of this paper. Here, awareness and engagement with advertisements when using TikTok, preferences and dislikes about advertisement content and style, thoughts about advertisements and their relevance, the degree of personalisation of the advertisements received when using social media, and consumption behaviours in social media are discussed, and finally the improvement of advertisements and the development of platforms on TikTok and other social media platforms are discussed.

Finally (7), the moderator thanked the participants for their co-operation and active involvement and ended the discussion.

Audio and video recordings of the discussions of focus group were made using the screen recording tool of QuickTime player and the recording feature of mobile phones. The audio was recorded in text form after the focus group discussion.

According to Mayring and Fenzl (2019), the following transcription rules were defined:

- Focus group participants were anonymous. T1 to T7 were used to identify participants.
- Content should be transcribed completely and verbatim. Unimportant inflections (e.g., emm, you know, like, ah....) were not recorded and pauses.
- Interruptions due to network errors or other reasons are not recorded.
- Important body language and expressions are recorded in parentheses.

As the majority of the participants were German-speaking natives, the focus group discussions were conducted in English with some German vocabulary interspersed in order to avoid missing comments due to lack of language proficiency. During the transcription process, the researchers translated the transcripts according to their language skills and DeepL tool support. The full text can be found in the Appendix (separate

document). The process of qualitative content analysis of these is described in the next chapter.

6.3.3 Qualitative content analysis of the focus group

Qualitative content analysis is an evaluative approach. It can be used to examine texts generated during scientific research data collecting. Transcripts of open interviews, focus groups, newspaper articles, online material, and so on are all examples of qualitative content analysis. In contrast to other text analysis methods, categorization is the primary aspect of qualitative content analysis. Other qualitative text analysis methods do not require assessment categories. However, in qualitative content analysis, text excerpts are assigned to groups using rigorous rules. Qualitative content analysis explicitly outlines the assessment components and evaluation procedures, allowing researchers to conduct a systematic review. (Mayring & Fenzl, 2019, pp.633-634).

6.3.3.1 Qualitative content analysis methods

Mayring and Fenzl (2019) summarise the various methods of qualitative content analysis, which can be broadly categorised into the following three areas:

1. Inductive content analysis:

The goal of this method is mainly to reduce material. By omitting, summarising, constructing, integrating, selecting and bundling methods, unimportant parts of the material are removed and only the main parts are summarised and explained. In this way, the researcher obtains a clearer and shorter description.

2. Expository content analysis:

For terms or sentences with imprecise meanings in the textual material, the researcher* can add other material to facilitate interpretation. The insertions can come from the context of the original text, or the researcher can use relevant content from other materials. Simply put, by this method, textual material can be explained in greater detail.

3. Structured content analysis:

Researchers can classify textual material according to predetermined organisational or specific criteria. By screening and categorising textual material, structuring can be made more precise. Definitions and contents of different categories can also be easily distinguished.

In this thesis, these methods are selected according to the status of the various contents (Mayring & Fenzl, 2019, pp.637-638).

6.3.3.2 Segment of analysis and categories

In accordance with the basic principles of Mayring and Fenzl (2019), the following units of analysis were defined to improve the accuracy of the content analysis:

- Each complete statement by participants was defined as a coding unit (the smallest material component to be analysed). These statements must be directly or indirectly related to the topic.
- The context unit (the most significant text component fitting into a category) was defined as the participants' entire response to a topic.
- The unit of analysis in this study was the transcription created for the focus group discussion.

Based on the above definitions and the text material collected, the focus group transcripts, with a concentration on TikTok and comparative analyses across social media platforms, were classified into the following five main categories:

1. General usage of social media: categories of participants' behaviour and consumption of social media in their daily lives.
2. Social media engagement and interaction: how participants interacted and engaged when using social media.
3. Advertising engagement and interaction: how participants interact and engage with advertising when using social media.
4. Advertising perceptions: Participants' perceptions of the advertisements they receive when using social media.
5. Comparative study for further Marketing: how are the differences effecting the

Marketing strategy.

(Mayring & Fenzl, 2019, pp.635-637).

These main categories are also divided into smaller categories. The specific qualitative content analysis will be explained in the following chapters.

7 Descriptive Results and qualitative analyses

According to the Table below, a category system was developed in this work, consisting of five main categories, each of which is further split into a number of sub-categories. The categories are based on the themes covered during the focus groups.

Main category	Sub-category
General usage of social media	Platform usage
	Content Consumption
Social media engagement	Engagement with content
	Interaction & Community on TikTok
	User experience
	Content discovery and Recommendation algorithm
Advertising engagement and interaction	Ad Awareness and Engagement
	Consumer behaviour
Advertising perceptions	Perception of Ad content and Style
	Relevance and Personalization
Comparative study for further Marketing	Content Creation
	Platform development

Table 3 Main and secondary categories of the focus group

7.1 General usage of social media

The moderator started the discussion with the warm-up question “What is the first social media that you use every day?” to get the participants into the discussion and increase the motivation of the seven participants. The moderator then discussed with the participants about their basic usage of TikTok and compared it to other social media such as Instagram and YouTube. This set of topics can be subdivided into the following two sub-categories: Platform usage and Content Consumption

7.1.1 Platform usage

In the discussion on general social media use, participants focused specifically on TikTok and shared how often they use the platform compared to Instagram and YouTube.

The moderator asked, how often do you use TikTok and how long do you stay on a single session compared to Instagram and YouTube? This question was designed to give an idea of the average time and frequency of usage that users spend on TikTok or other social media platforms. Participants' answers also indicated that the duration of spending varies depending on different factors such as the time of day or the scenario.

All participants indicated that they use TikTok daily. P6 said: *“TikTok, I actually use it every day, just for a few minutes [...] You can find the content you need in a very short period of time. Whereas on other platforms you sometimes have to search for content that you might be interested in”* (P6, p.99). This shows how efficient TikTok is at finding niche content quickly.

Four participants reported using TikTok more frequently and for longer periods of time than other platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, which were used more selectively.

P2 compared the use of TikTok and Instagram and found a significant difference in the amount of time spent on the two. TikTok was the most favoured platform to use. P2 said: *“I also use every day [...] TikTok is used 16 hours a week [...]. Instagram is only used for 5 hours.”* (P2, p. 99).

P4 stated that the reason for using TikTok for a long time is that the purpose of using it is different from other social platforms. Instagram is mainly used to connect with friends, whereas YouTube is used for more specific needs, such as studying or listening to music. P4 said: *“ I use TikTok longer and more often than other apps [...]. On Instagram I only look at stories and posts that don't last more than 5 minutes [...] but will soon quit again. I'm only on YouTube when I need to be, but for longer periods of time and I'm on TikTok almost all the time ”* (P4, p. 99).

P7 reflects on how TikTok has changed their media consumption habits and made them

impatient with longer content. “*I used to use YouTube as my main consumption platform, but since TikTok I think I've become impatient because I don't have the patience to take in information.*” P7 said (P7, p.99).

P2 agreed with P7's sentiment, while P1 offered a more nuanced view, “[...] *favourite YouTuber, so I will slow down without any speed up [...] Instagram or TikTok, I will speed up.*” indicating that their engagement rate depends on the content and platform (P1, p. 99).

P7 also mentions that he will self-limit his TikTok usage: “*I have to set a time limit on my phone for usage. after 15 minutes I get a notification to close TikTok, maybe 30 minutes, sometimes even longer.*” (P7, p.100). P7 feels that it is important to manage screen time and that it is easy to be tempted to continue browsing content and even to lose a sense of time.

On the other hand, P5 has stopped using TikTok, stating that he prefers longer YouTube videos to shorter TikTok clips. He noted that they rarely use TikTok unless someone else sends them a video, and that they find TikTok's shorter videos less engaging: “*I've actually only been using TikTok lately because I don't use it myself because someone sends me a video [...]. I actually prefer to watch longer YouTube videos that I'm actually interested in*” (P5, p.100). P5 also details the way in which YouTube is used, stating that it is common to watch videos that are between 10 and 20 minutes long, and that if multiple videos are watched, each viewing can be up to an hour long, P5 said: “*Depends on the content of the video, but most of the videos are between 10 and 20 minutes [...] the duration of each video viewing can easily reach an hour.*” (P5, p.100).

7.1.2 Content Consumption

The moderator shifted to the next main topic, which was Social Media Engagement. Asking the participants first which types of content they like to watch.

The topics are mainly focused on the participants personal interests. One of the most mentioned types of content are edited clips from Television and Movie scenes, while other content types such as travel, car-content and beauty products such as makeup were also

mentioned. Some of the participants noticed that their recommended videos end up gravitating towards video edits from various shows. the participants didn't mind this transition to a different type of content due to this type of content allowing them to enjoy remixes and cuts from either known media or helps them discover new shows.

P6 and P3 both note that TikTok's recommendation algorithm has introduced them to new content, particularly show clips that lead them to discover and binge-watch new series. P6 mentions that their algorithm evolved from showing travel and car-related content to including clips from TV-Shows, "*My recommended algorithm changed from mostly travel and cars to also shorts of shows [...] I keep watching.*" (P6, p.101).

P3 adds that these recommended shorts often lead them to binge-watch the full series. "*[...] then I find shows that binge-watch. Which is kind of cool.*" (P3, p.101).

P4's usage of TikTok is primarily focused on short, funny videos, along with challenges, makeup videos, and clips from shows. "*I mainly watch [...] videos on 'For You' page shows. Sometimes they are games or challenges, but also makeup videos and cuts from 'a specific TV-Show'.*" P4 said (P4, p.104). The spectrum of content consumed can hint to the elaborate ways the recommendation page can string together various types of content which can appeal to the user despite these interests having no overarching connection to each other.

The topics are mainly focused on the participant's personal interests. another quoted content type is comedy, specifically "comedy skits" and "memes."

P5 describes his TikTok experience as mostly centred around their girlfriend but emphasized that their primary consumption is primarily in the comedy genre "*comedy skits [...] Sometimes my girlfriend, especially, sends me some cooking things, maybe. But mostly it's just memes.*" (P5, p.101).

When asked about the differences between TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, participants debated over the topic if authenticity in content as a key distinguishing factor for TikTok or not.

P2 noted that TikTok feels more “authentic” and “real” compared to Instagram, where content is often more polished and curated, P2 said: *“I think it's more authentic [...] Insta is like a clearer picture while on TikTok. It's more simple way in more like, real-life stuff, not like the perfect picture.”* (P2, p.101). With P2s statement there was a short debate about if content on TikTok felt more authentic in general compared to Instagram and YouTube.

P6 agreed, adding that Instagram often feels “fake,” with content that seems overly professional and promotional, particularly in the context of influencer marketing, *“A lot of that feels just fake, like paid for [...] from what I've seen on TikTok, it is usually just people going to the place, making their videos [...] And Instagram is usually, [...] The cameras are very professional, usually, so it doesn't feel quite as authentic.”*, P6 said (P6.p.104). P6 adding that they dislike this type of content, due to its “corporate” feel. P6 preferring more amateur styles of production to add a sense of realness to the presented content.

P4 disagreed and commented that TikTok is at its best when it comes to creative videos and Instagram is more suited to bonding with friends and sharing parts of their lives. P4 said: *“On Instagram, it's more pictures and stories from friends, and on YouTube I sometimes watch series and educational videos, otherwise I listen to music.”* (P4, p.101).

7.2 Social media engagement

In this chapter the focus lies on the user engagement with the platforms Instagram, YouTube and TikTok. This includes the interaction between users and content, community building, the overall user experience and the content discovery.

7.2.1 Engagement with content

The moderator moved onto the next category which is how the participants engage with the content on TikTok specifically, this question factored in if the users like to comment, share or otherwise engage directly with the content instead of just consuming it.

Most of the participants do indeed comment and share the content they enjoy or find interesting.

P2 mentioned that she shares videos she thinks her friends might enjoy, *“In my case it's mostly like and share [...] I have like my friends on there and I know what they will also be like that, so I'll just send it to them mostly basically”*, P2 said (P2, p.102). The other participants concurred with the sentiment and mentioned that almost none of them comment on videos, such as in the case of P4, *“I rarely comment. But on Instagram and TikTok I often like videos and pictures [...] I also often forward a funny TikTok video to my friends”*, P4 said (P4, p.104). The only outlier here was P3 who was the only participant who mentions that she comments on videos. P3 said: *“I like the content and sometimes send it to friends, but TikTok is the platform I least Comment on any videos.”* (P3, p.102). This indicates she actively comments on the other platforms.

7.2.2 Interaction & Community on TikTok

The moderator followed by asking what difference there is when interacting with TikTok compared to Instagram and YouTube. This is in regard to the audio-visual content on the platforms. The participants went into detail how they use the features and view the content itself, they agreed that most of the features between are similar and there are few differences among them.

P2 mentioned a unique function on TikTok. P2 said: *“[...] if you like want to comment on your own video, you can put this video in your background or you can use a short clip before it just for the poster will be linked [...]”* (P2, p.102).

To note a general difference between the platforms P6 mentioned that YouTube is the closest to traditional media, P6 said: *“I feel YouTube is the most traditional out of the video platforms. It's the closest to actual TV because also the ad style[...].”* (P6, p.102).

P5 touched on the topic of a community feeling. This is a point in which the participants heavily disagreed. He believes that TikTok lacks a strong sense of community between creators and their viewers, largely due to the short and quick nature of TikTok videos. The short video format due to its brief nature of content duration hinders the creators to form a bond with the audience. P5 believes platforms like YouTube, where the longer content might

foster a stronger community feeling among viewers. He claims that TikTok seems more focused on maximizing viewership and thus focusing on increasing monetary value. Said P5: *“[...] In my feeling, there isn't really a like for a content creator on TikTok. I don't think there's much of a community feeling. [...] it's so short or quick that I don't think there's really a community feeling between the creator and the viewers. Because it's designed to, you know, get as many people watching as possible. [...] It feels like the creators and their followers, right? [...] They're not that close, really. People don't really look forward to a new TikTok, for example, or looking forward to whatever. [...] It feels this way compared to YouTube, for example, where people, you know, are waiting for a longer video or something like that.”* (P5, p.103).

Other participants such as P1 and P2 disagreed completely with the sentiment. P2 elaborated on her opinion. She argued that the length of wait time for a video from a creator to be uploaded can be quite substantial, on TikTok however you have an array of multiple videos which you can engage with. Furthermore, she mentioned “Lives”, livestreams where you can talk to the creator in real time. Said P2: *“[...] You wait weeks for one video in YouTube while you can have 10 videos, but short ones. It also depends on how the content creators does their videos. [...] a person will be waiting for another one to know what it is. Also, there is also “Lives” if you want to [...] interact more with the community. [...]”* (P2, p.103).

P5 adds the point that many YouTubers feature question and answer sessions. She feels these Q&A sessions allow creators to bond with the audience but due to the planned nature of the streams leads to them not feeling personal. “Lives” on TikTok allow for immediate user feedback. P1 said: *“[...] for the YouTuber, like they always collect all the questions and do a Q&A session. [...] you will feel like you are interacting with the people, [...] But for TikTok, [...] they are more like comments immediately or “like” what your comment there. The interaction is more on time. You don't feel like you need to wait for a few days, and you wait for the YouTuber's Q&A session to listen what you want to hear. [...]”* (P1, pp.103-104). This fuelled further conversation, YouTube while also possessing a live-stream function, P1

mentioned that the creators don't use them equally much. Most participants then agreed that communication with other users is more fluent on TikTok.

Following up with the conversation the moderator asked the other participants how they felt about communities on TikTok. This led to a short discussion in which P4 and P6 stated their opinions on the matter. P4 indicated that users on TikTok are helpful while users on Instagram are more insular, sticking to their private bubble. YouTube was seen by P4 as the least community driven, being a primarily content consumption-based platform. Said P4 *“On TikTok, I would say that the people there are very helpful. If you post a comment, many people often reply to it. On Instagram, you tend to follow people you already know [...] It's less interactive on YouTube, as you mainly consume the videos without commenting or interacting much [...]”* (P4, p.104).

P6 on the other pointed out that every platform has its own sense of community building, mentioning since it's by far the oldest active platform that, there are creators from decades previously who in that timeframe built up loyal fanbases. He also added that YouTube in the past had several features to be able to connect to other users. One of those was the ability to directly message other users, a feature which doesn't exist anymore. P6 said: *“I think every platform has some sort of community building. [...] YouTube [...] it's just the oldest platform there currently in usage. That even users from 20 years ago just had the natural time to build up community over that span of time. [...] I have been on YouTube since 2006 and there have been many features present, such as the ability to DM other users, sadly those have been almost completely removed from the site.”* (P6, p.104).

The moderator interjected and asked the focus group if there are specific interaction possibilities on TikTok which other social media platforms don't possess. A unique feature only found on the platform.

P6 immediately answered by mentioning a factor which was completely new to him. On TikTok it is possible to integrate online stores within their profile, content or livestream. He compares the function to Instagram where the user would have to jump to a third-party sight in order to access the store. P6 further mentions how TikTok in other regions have an

even more integrated live-shopping personality. P6 said: “[...] on TikTok it was the first time that I saw [...] how fast brands can plug their online store. Usually on Instagram [...] they do an ad, if you wanted to jump to that online shop, you'd have to go on their profile extra and click the link, [...]. But on TikTok, it's usually way faster. Over here, you still can't direct shop. Like you can in China or the US.” (P6, p.105).

P5 added to P2's previous opinion that he found the “Stitching” tool very interesting, since it allows you to connect two videos together, it allows for easy video creation. P2 agreed with the sentiment. The feature is designed to be simple but functional. P5 said: “[...] It's also a way to make interaction between creators and the community, a bit faster. [...] TikTok is designed to just be content as fast as possible, as simple as possible. It's an easy tool to create more videos [...]” (P5, p.105).

P6 responded to the previous points in agreement and claimed that the feature allows for more users to engage with content together. P6 said: “[...] you answer or you give a comment or you like, this interact data will be received by both creators. [...]. I think it's also a way to gather more people to be involved by one content” (P6, p.105).

7.2.3 User experience

The moderator moved onto the next sub-category which includes the user experience. Asking the participants on how they view the overall user experience on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube.

The overall prevailing opinion by the focus group participants was split on the topic. They either preferred TikTok or YouTube, interesting to note nobody brought up Instagram as their preferred social media platform. This split in opinion could be owed to the inherent design of TikTok and YouTube. Since many users enjoy one video-format over the other.

The first participant to answer the question was P6, who stated that they prefer to watch Car-related content primarily on there because due to the short nature of the videos, more features and experience gets shown. He sees that content duration on YouTube is often padded by various details, which he finds to be unnecessary. To add to his current distaste for attributes

of YouTube, he mentions that due to long videos being very ad-heavy he only watches with ad-blocking software, finally comparing it again to a more traditional TV-watching experience. Said P6: “[...] I like to watch car content, [...]. TikTok is in that sense usually better. Because they show the features of a vehicle in a fast way [...], you actually see the driving part. On YouTube, there's a lot of fluff. And what's very annoying about YouTube is the ads. Which interrupts the video, especially if it's a longer video. [...] I only use YouTube with ad blocker. [...]. I think of TikTok. It doesn't have to add intrusions. So not that, not like a TV where there's a commercial break. [...].” (P6, pp.105-106).

P4 concurred with P6 and simply stated that TikTok is more active than YouTube. This was followed by P2 adding to P6s point that she believes that TikTok is going the same way as YouTube in regard to advertisement on the platform. Her perspective is that the platform is still growing and over time will host more intrusive ad-campaigns. P2 said: “[...] like you're watching the video. It's ending. And then a few seconds of ads, and then the next video. It wasn't like this, [...] two years ago. Because now they're like growing. [...]. It's now also coming to TikTok [...]. it will be more and more.” (P2, p.106).

P3 commenced to state her opinion that on average she prefers YouTube because she consumes a large amount of video content. Due to her interest in cooking, she enjoys the fact that on YouTube, many creators she follows have their content in both formats and interwoven cross-platform. P3 said “: [...] I like to watch a lot of content. And on TikTok [...] With YouTube, a lot of creators that make longer videos and have their own website. They also make “shorts” [...] cooking video, and then I can go to their profile and watch longer [...] so I prefer cooking content YouTube over TikTok.” (P3, p.106). Following P1 commented that she watches TikTok daily and monthly checks in on YouTube.

7.2.4 Content discovery and Recommendation algorithm

On the topic of content discovery, the moderator asked the participants how they discover content or creators on TikTok and contrasting how the process differs on TikTok and YouTube. The participants opinion didn't differ on the basic premise, according to the focus

group the content recommendation algorithms function similar across each platform. Most answers came down to the participants describing the usual way they discover content.

One difference mentioned in the discussion was that YouTube's algorithm is supposedly less efficient at finding new and interesting content compared to Instagram and TikTok. P2 mentioned that YouTube recommends videos from creators she was already subscribed to and TikTok's algorithm presents more new content. P2 said: "[...] YouTube also like suggests you similar to what you watched or the one you already subscribed [...]" (P2, p.106).

P6 interjected and added to P2 point, by stating the "For You" page kept showing old material he watched before and that doesn't happen to him on TikTok. P6 said: "[...] *I think the YouTube algorithm, [...]* recommends to me videos I already watched a long time ago. On TikTok, you can find new creators very fast. I've never had that I got recommended the same video again on TikTok. [...]" (P6, p.106).

P3 mentioned "YouTube Shorts" but contrasted this feature to creators on TikTok, who by the design of the platform use this feature automatically much more frequently. She also concurred it is easier finding new material on TikTok to consume. Said P3: "[...] *You Tube creators that are making "shorts". So, you either already know them, or it's a limited number of creators compared to TikTok, [...]. I think it's easy to find new things on TikTok compared to YouTube, because you have a broader spectrum of content creators that are making "Shorts" [...]*" (P3, pp.106-107). She added then that when it comes to her friends, they recommend each other creators and videos by word of mouth.

This was followed by P5 delving deep into a cross-platform comparison where he stated that he feels Instagram's "Explore" feature is the least useful whilst disagreeing that YouTube "For You" page is not efficient. He also compared YouTube to other social media platforms not mentioned in the question. Most of his engagement comes from other users sending him videos on either TikTok or Instagram. He prefers finding new content to consume instead of just following creators he knows before. Due to his distaste for other social media platforms, he tends to stick with YouTube. P5 said: "[...] *it's mostly got a broad variety of content creators because I get sent videos mostly from people I know and friends. If you're asking*

about YouTube, the recommendation page, when you open YouTube, this is mostly where I browse other than my subscription pages [...] I go to the explore page and look over there. And most of the time, there's something that's interesting, n YouTube, I think the algorithm works pretty well. And for Instagram, it's probably mostly the same as on TikTok. [...], but I think the Explore page on Instagram is mostly garbage. [...] one social media I use a lot as well is X. [...] It's so bad at this point. [...] And I also use Reddit a lot. But Reddit is a bit of a contrast because over there, [...] because you only really get postings from the communities or the subreddits you're subscribed to.” (P5, p.107)

Following up on the previous question the moderator followed up with a question specifically concerning the recommendation algorithm on TikTok. Asking if the questions users are on average more appealing to the participants.

The participants were in overall agreement that the recommendation algorithm is effective at what it shows to the users. Also commending the feature which lets you filter videos, so that you won't get recommended videos the user isn't interested in. Also commenting on how content from different regions may interest the more or less.

P1 one mentioned that she enjoys most videos she gets recommended and goes into detail how the algorithm is sometimes annoying for her due to over recommending certain types of videos. Said P1: “[...] *They're always recommending me things I like. [...] I was searching some workout video and then they kept updating me with that. So sometimes it's annoying because I just want to have a look for them. [...].*” (P3, p.107).

P4 added that she believes the recommendation system keeps trying to adapt and improve to reflect the users' interests, giving an example of how she searched for school life-related content and now she keeps getting content from this field recommended to her even from different countries, which doesn't interest her. Furthermore, she mentioned how on Instagram she keeps seeing memes her friends like and on YouTube she gets videos she already watched recommended to her. “*I would say the algorithm is trying to adapt. As I've been searching for a lot about studying recently, it keeps suggesting videos about studying, [...] but also lots of videos about Semester Opening, which has to do with Germany and*

therefore interests me less [...] On Instagram, I often see memes that my friends like (have liked), and on YouTube, I often get suggested videos that I've already watched." P4 said (P4, p.108).

In response to the comparison the moderator interjected with a more focused question towards how the recommendation algorithm is different on each platform.

P7 answered the question by stating how he doesn't see a huge difference in the overall recommendations he sees between platforms, commending TikTok that their system is effective.

Adding to the previous question the moderator asked if the participants would have opinions to improve recommendation algorithms, by adding or taking away features.

P6 stated the opinion that he would like a feature which could filter content from different regions as he prefers to watch American and British creators. He admits that TikTok has a feature which allows you to prioritize content you enjoy but laments that often times he still gets unrelated recommendations. P6 said: *"I think the ability to filter out content from certain spheres basically, [...] I usually watch [...] American or British users. [...] But when you keep scrolling and then you get a random video[...] that's not really part of your interest so much. So TikTok does have to feature to prioritize your interests, but not to completely filter out stuff you don't actually really care about."* (P6, p.108).

P4 disagreed with the sentiment, mentioning that users have the ability to filter out content in depth, based on various keywords, such as "user", "music" etc.

7.3 Advertising engagement and interaction

The focus of this chapter lies on how users engage with advertisement on the three platforms. Trying to understand how users notice commercials during regular usage and how these can affect the user experience. Furthermore, exploring how advertisements influence the consumer behaviour.

7.3.1 Ad Awareness and Engagement

The interviewer went on to the next main part regarding advertisement engagement and interaction on the TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. The moderator went on and asked the focus group how they notice advertisement during their regular usage of the platforms. Their general perspective was that Commercials on YouTube are severely detrimental to the user experience, whilst advertisement on TikTok being handled much more subtly and non-intrusive.

P6 stated he thinks using YouTube without ad-blocking software to be barely usable. This is due to the commercials appearing before, between or after the video. Furthermore, criticising that the sound volume being disproportionately louder than the video itself. Commenting that without the ad-free “YouTube Premium” (a subscription service), or the usage of adblocking software, he wouldn’t use the platform at all. Said P6: *“I think YouTube is very clear cut. You click on the video, immediately your ears get blasted by some [...] commercial, which is way too loud. But then the video itself is very quiet. TikTok, I think it's a bit more, it's not quite as abrasive, usually. [...] You can skip them [...] in order to actually enjoy YouTube, you either have to have YouTube Premium, or have to run I think you have to run I think you, in order to actually enjoy YouTube, you have to run it with ad block. Otherwise, it's almost unusable.”* (P6, p.109).

P3 concurred with the sentiment of P6 and said that on TikTok she doesn’t recognize advertisement and if she does, she skips it via scrolling, on YouTube she uses ad-blocking software. Further criticising the frequency of the ads appearing on YouTube. P3 said: *“[...] I don't even notice if there is any advertisement because I just swipe it away, [...] so it does not really have an effect on me. And on YouTube, I'm using ad blockers, so I also don't really get any advertisements [...] you have two ads before the video comes, and then if it's a longer video, [...], ad breaks, it's terrible to watch without an ad blocker.”* (P3, p.109).

As a user with “YouTube Premium” P5 states that he naturally doesn’t see ads due to it on YouTube. He comments he sees them commonly on TikTok and other social media platforms with the most appearing on Instagram. P5 said: *“So I have YouTube Premium.*

Therefore, I don't really see ads. Compared to TikTok, [...] I see a lot more ads on TikTok. [...] There are a lot of sponsored content or people that can buy postings or something like this. [...] And then is Instagram.” (P5, p.109).

The moderator then briefly introduced the participants to the different types of adverts in social software, such as traditional adverts, co-operative adverts and influencer sponsored adverts etc.

P6 and P1 were generally critical and sceptical of advertisements and advertising content on social platforms.

P6 thinks adverts on Instagram are fake, and she doesn't watch adverts on YouTube at all. P6 said: *“on Instagram, the sponsored content [...] is a legitimate, ordinary video. That's why many times it feels kind of fake [...] YouTube [...] It's like 70% ads, 30% content.”* (P6, p.109)

P1 states that she believes that certain YouTubers have hidden sponsored content, which confuses users unsure if the content is organic or paid for. P1 said: *“[...] I feel there's a YouTuber that she has lots of sponsored content [...] She won't tell straightforward in the like in the video that this party is sponsored. So, this will make people confused like if she really like recommending for based on her use or she just recommending for sponsor.”* (P1, pp.109-110)

P4 drew comparisons between the frequency of ads and how she perceives them on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. The advertisement on YouTube is non-interactive, on Instagram they offer some information and on TikTok they are more suited to her interests. As well as praising the ability to scroll past the ads. P4 said: *“[...] on TikTok I often see advertisements when you scroll like that and then maybe after five videos there is an advertisement, [...] you can just scroll on, [...] on YouTube [...] you always have to wait 10-15 seconds or even longer if you can't skip it, which is annoying. And on Instagram [...] there is also an advertisement and most of the time it says there, yes, if you need more information, you can click on the link. [...] I think that on Instagram and on YouTube it's just sponsored advertisements that just somehow show you, not adapted to the interests.*

And on TikTok it's sometimes a little bit about the interests [...]" (P4, p.110).

The moderator proceeded to ask which types of ads catch the attention of the users and make them interested in the content of the commercial.

The participants overwhelmingly stated that for the most part they aren't interested in ads and skip them whenever possible, however multiple participants stated that they become more interested if there is a discount on a product involved. The only outlier being P2 who stated that she actually enjoys creative ads.

The moderator went on and asked the focus group how likely they are to interact with ads on TikTok, with a few examples where a user would click on a provided link in an ad and jump to the buying page.

P3 said that it would be very unlikely for her to jump directly on a store-page, if she saw the product in a physical store, she might be interested in it. P3 said: *"[...] I would not go on the website [...] I might see it in the store and then decide to buy it because I'm curious, but I don't think I would go to the link and then buy it from the website"* (P3, p.111).

The moderator specified the question and stated an example where the user would receive a free product or coupon if they interacted with the ad.

Some participants mentioned they would engage if there wouldn't be additional fees and if the offered product would be of tangible use for them. A perspective shared by most participants is a rather indifferent attitude towards advertisement presenting a more passive approach to them. Showing potential interest towards the products rather the ads themselves.

The focus group was asked if they can recall certain campaign which aired on TikTok. One which promoted a store, product or TikTok itself.

Most of the participants couldn't recall specific campaigns but a select few. Most of the campaigns remembered either stood out from the rest or offered something interesting to the participants.

P3 commented that she saw an advertisement for a club and followed through and went

to the advertised party. P6 mentioned that he vaguely remembers a political ad which was conducted cross-border, recalling it was conducted in a cross-platform fashion. P6 said: *“[...] It was a cross-border platform ad campaign on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. [...] it was actually a political Ads for one of the newer parties. And that one became pretty popular.”* (P6, p.112).

The moderator followed up and asked if certain influenced the participants behaviour. The overall opinion was that campaigns can directly impact the perception a user has of the product or brand. This effect can either be seen in a positive or negative perspective.

P6 commented to his previous point that the campaign he mentioned made him a tad more sceptical in regard to intent of the ad. Second guessing the advertisers to which agenda, they are trying to promote, especially in regard to the previously mentioned political advertisement. P6 said: *“[...] I think I’ve also become a bit more, not sceptical necessarily, but because most of their ads used to be, didn’t have that much to do with their message. [...] I’m like, what are you guys trying to sell me here? And then very crucial if I swipe away or click out of the video.”* (P6, p.112).

P1 mentioned that she found interacted with a pop-up store commercial for a fashion brand in France. Another commercial she remembered was for a ketchup brand. When she went grocery shopping and saw the product and the commercial made her buy the ketchup. In her opinion campaigns certainly influence her behaviour either online or offline. P1: *“For me, TikTok, I saw there’s a pop-up store. [...] They have a pop-up store in France, [...] And there’s another also event promote I saw on TikTok. It’s for the ketchup brand. And I saw that, so I went shopping and pass by the counter they have and get a free ketchup. For me [...] if it’s the thing we are interested, it does actually do some influence our behaviour in a digital environment or offline.”* (P1, p.112).

The moderator further asked if there was any difference for the participants between Instagram and TikTok when it comes to effectiveness of ads.

P6 said that he never saw a campaign on Instagram which interested him enough to engage with further on TikTok he said that commercials featuring food-related items interest him

more. P5 on the other hand stated he finds the ads on Instagram highly interesting; he states he might be somewhat biased since he uses the platform the most. He goes on to say that the algorithm is influenced by what he googles. P5: “[...] *sometimes the Instagram ads are more on point than any other ads. But that might be. That might be because I use, probably use Instagram the most out of all the social medias. [...] I think the Instagram ads in general are actually pretty good. Yeah, they're better targeted. [...] Because sometimes, I'm just Googling stuff and suddenly I get a recommendation or something like this on Instagram.*” (P5, p.113).

P3 goes on and mentions that she has never clicked on a link provided by a YouTube commercial, to note is however she has engaged with commercials on Instagram and TikTok.

7.3.2 Consumer behaviour

The moderator moved on and asked the participants if they ever purchased an item through a brand advertisement on TikTok, the purchase could have been off- or online.

Most participants have indeed made a purchase on and offline because they saw a commercial for a product, they saw on TikTok. P4 gave here the most comprehensive answer. She actively looks into different products and views reviews or user ratings to see if the product is up to her standard. Her main criteria are if she currently has a need for the product and the brand or product has a good reputation. Interesting to note is that she believes Instagram and YouTube advertisements are less trustworthy. P4 said: “[...] *on TikTok, when I see skincare products, I would maybe try to try it first, [...] I've actually bought products after seeing them on TikTok because the recommendations often seem honest. This happens to me less often on Instagram and YouTube because I trust the advertising there less. [...] I would say that I first check whether the offer meets my needs. [...] It's also important that it's a brand that I know or that has a good reputation. Finally, I look at the comments and then decide whether I want to buy the product or not*”. (P4, p.113).

Other participants mentioned they only consider purchasing a product if it something they

are naturally interested in and if they do, it is usually accompanied by some background research on the brand and product.

P7 stated here specifically that his purchase behavior changed due to being disappointed with a product he purchased. Now he does background research as well. Said P7: “[...] *Every time I saw a commercial or recommendation by creators, I do research first. So, I guess it kind of influenced me.*” (P7, p.114).

The moderator then asked specifically about if purchase intent differs platform to platform, essentially if the participants trusted advertisement campaigns more on specific platforms and what factors influence the decision.

P6 immediately responded by mentioning he avoids advertisement on YouTube completely due to their high frequency, with Instagram he would only consider engaging with them if they are travel related. His primary criteria are on the presentation of the ad, specifically the sound volume. P6 said: “[...] *I don't really watch ads on YouTube anymore because there's just way too many of them. Instagram [...] if it's something travel related [...]. For me it would be presentation first and foremost. If the ad is extremely loud, I immediately click out of it [...]*” (P6, p.114).

P3 mentioned that a factor which influences her purchase intent is if the ad uses a celebrity in it, she trusts the product less in this case, since she feels that the brand relies on the fame of the person instead on the quality of the product. She gives examples for what types of content interest her. She doesn't trust campaigns on Instagram and TikTok in general due to her being aware of scams. P3 said: “*If I see a famous person in the ad, I just feel like they just use their face because their product is not good enough. [...] On Instagram and TikTok, it's kind of like running online shops. Now I don't go on those anymore because I know there's been scams. So, something that looks too good to be true is most likely a scam.*” (P3, p.114).

Other participants stated that the content they are most likely influenced by the content and presentation itself, regardless of the influencer or other surrounding factors. P1, P4 and P7 all agree that the content needs to meet their needs.

P1 mentions that she does thorough background checks on the content even if it meets her needs, especially if an influencer recommends a certain product or service, giving the example of an influencer who according to her overhypes certain locations. She values honesty in marketing. P1 said: “[...] *she did really good videos, the music, the light, everything is perfect. But there's no, I mean, in her, all the videos, there's no bad words for the restaurants. Only the good things for the restaurants [...] I knew that [...] it's not true. [...] And there's nothing that she won't recommend. [...] I will really care about the contents of the advertise or the videos that they create. Being honest for me is really important.*” (P1, p.115).

7.4 Advertising perceptions

Here the participants were asked how they generally feel about the advertisements and how they perceive them and asked how relevant the ads are to their user experience. Naming advertisement features they enjoy on TikTok.

7.4.1 Perception of Ad content and Style

Following the short discussion the moderator inquired about how the participants feel about the ads on TikTok.

The overall opinion was that there is a general feeling of annoying with the increased frequency of ads appearing on platforms like YouTube, while the participants praise the less intrusive nature of the ads on TikTok. While many participants feel that the frequency of ads will only increase over time, when the platform has had enough time to establish itself.

P2 was especially vocal about her distaste to the increasing nature of advertisement on the platform. P6 believes that most content on TikTok is produced by individual users and not professional influencers and brands.

P4 in particular feels that commercials on Instagram and YouTube are less creative and this is why the participants feel that ads on TikTok are handled better. The brevity of them on TikTok being key in why this perception is there. P4 said: “*I notice ads on TikTok quite*

often, but they bother me less than on Instagram and YouTube because they are often creative and well-integrated into the content. On Instagram I often see sponsored posts and stories [...] The ads on TikTok are often short and sometimes even creative, and they blend in well with the rest of the content. [...] On YouTube, ads are often longer and more boring.” (P4, p.115).

P5 states that he feels that advertisement is necessary but he feels they aren't too influential on the user. He thinks that while he might become interested in a product, he still won't buy it unless he has done thorough research previously P5: *“[...] online advertisement is usually not that influential in my opinion. [...] when I see a product, I do a lot of research on it especially if it's a bit pricier. I look at a lot of reviews and I look at a lot of those cases you know. I just I don't buy things simply because I see an advertisement, but I might get interested in it [...].” (P5, pp.115-116).*

P3 added to the point she feels that advertisement is going to become much more common on TikTok, mentioning the “premium content” feature some influencers use. P3: *“[...] I feel like they're going to increase the advertisements on TikTok or Instagram [...] I think that's going to be the future like we've seen on YouTube. I noticed TikTok recently started providing premium content so if you follow this influencer and his video is about two to three minutes, and you can see the first 15 seconds and if you want to watch more you have to subscribe him.” (P3, p.116).*

7.4.2 Relevance and Personalization

The moderator went on to ask which features of ads the focus group they find especially appealing. The participants had to think for a while to find a specific feature they enjoy on TikTok which the other platforms don't possess.

P2 shared her opinion that she doesn't find any aspect ad-relating appealing, whilst P4 stated that she enjoyed the fact that due to the short-video format she can react and skip uninteresting ads very appealing.

P6 gave a more in-depth answer regarding the how he thinks advertisement should be

handled on platforms. He would like to see them as least intrusive as possible. He gives the example of YouTube in the past where advertisement was handled differently to today.

P6: *“I think the best way to handle them would make them as non-intrusive to the content as possible. Like many years back [...] YouTube actually did it fairly well I think where there was banners and stuff like that on the side [...].”* (P5, p. 116).

The moderator asked more specifically if the platform is personalised to the participant’s interest. The participants did feel that the recommendations they got were based on their general interests and location.

P2 and P6 confirmed they received content which was related to things to do around Vienna.

P4 stated that she receives content recommended to her which is more tailored to her interests, differently to YouTube and Instagram, where she doesn’t get accurate recommendations. P4: *“[...]I find the personalization of advertising on TikTok to be pretty good. It often shows me products that really interest me, compared to Instagram and YouTube.”* (P4, p.116).

7.5 Comparative study for further Marketing

For comparative study and marketing the focus group was asked which types of content they believe thrives on TikTok as compared to YouTube and Instagram. Following up with questions in regard to how the participants view multimedia-based content and if they had suggestions on how to improve advertisement on TikTok.

7.5.1 Content Creation of Ads

The moderator asked the focus group how brands should tailor their content in order for them to get a better engagement rate from the user.

P6 stresses the importance of subtlety of the presentation, he pleads for the advertisement to be less intrusive, citing the example of YouTube where constant advertisements make engaging with the platform less enjoyable. P6 said: *“[...] If the advertisement is a bit more subtle, I assume or it's not intrusive into the content itself [...] because the ads are almost*

making the platform unwatchable at this point. I hope TikTok doesn't end up the same way." (P6, p.117)"

P3 mentions she values user feedback about a products quality, stressing she trusts certain creators based on previous research she conducted. P3 said *"[...] I will watch someone who in my opinion gives um good feedback so talks about good products and bad products [...] specifically look for I will specifically look for that creator and um that's how I think I would be influenced if I am doing my research in this kind of way."* (P3, p.117)

The other participants concurred with the perspective of honesty when advertising products and advertisement not to under look the viewers intellect.

P4 offered some further advice adding that brands should make use of TikTok's short video format, which incentives creativity. P4 said *"[...] I would advise brands to involve influencers who present their products in an honest and entertaining way. For TikTok specifically, short, creative videos that are somehow interactive or entertaining work best [...]."* (P4, p.118)

The moderator went on to ask about which type of content fares better on TikTok compared to Instagram and YouTube.

P6 mentioned that he believes due to the short-form video nature that comedy works the best, stating that long form comedy content to be disproportionately harder to create. P4 states that she believes the short format leads to increased creativity.

The moderator asked if any of the participants have been involved with TikTok challenges.

None of the participants have been part of such a trend, P3 mentioned that she had seen people on Instagram be part of a challenge, just not part of a TikTok Challenge.

The moderator shifted the topic to if the focus group was more interested or trusted content more if it was multimedia based, this means it contains both audio and video channels.

P6 stated he thinks it highly depends on the content the user is interested in. He mentions that it also depends on the type of content if multimedia is important. He comments further

that presentation of a video is a huge factor for him. P6 said: *“I think it really depends on the type of content you want to watch [...] for example some story or book reading feature multi-visual content is not that important, [...]”* (P6, p. 118).

P2 mentions she prefers that the content is not overdone in a visual effect way, she prefers for the content to be presented in a more natural way. P5 concurred with P2 regarding her preference for simple effect video. Furthermore, commenting that many videos on TikTok is overloaded with visual effects being detrimental to the viewing experience. P5 said: *“[...] even on TikTok you know like these kinds of videos where they have like so many effects and this and that all the time, it's just too much. But then again it depends on what kind of content you're making, but in my opinion it's better to have not too much.”* (P5, p.119).

7.5.2 Platform development

The moderator asked the participants if they had any ideas how the advertisement could become more effective on TikTok, asking the group if they had suggestions to improve the functions.

P6 responded by mentioning he would like to see more cross-platform integration. Adding that this integration would give the ability to rate products or services P6 said: *“[...] Cross-platform integration. What would be, I think, very beneficial is that, if there's a store on TikTok, they would have [...] user reviews integrated as well if they sell something.”* (P6, p.119).

The moderator went onto the last question, asking the group if they had suggestions how TikTok could improve the platform to make it meet user demand more.

P2 responded and mentions she would like the recommendation algorithm to be a bit broader in the types of content she gets recommended. She doesn't care for the current personalisation trend. P2 said: *“[...] TikTok becoming more and more specific. [...] I also would like to know something else and not only get like videos, only like on one of my interests. Before, I guess it was a bit broader, which was for me better, but now it's like*

getting more and more and more personalized [...]” (P2, p.119).

P6 mentioned that he would wish for a feature where the video could be played with a locked screen, since he likes to put on YouTube as background noise. Furthermore, he would an auto-play feature with a locked screen, so that the next video in a playlist could be played. P6 said: “ *I think feature that every social media platform or let's say video platform should integrate is the ability to play videos when your screen is paused so when the screen is closed [...] I assume for TikTok that would be you'd have to have an auto play coming to our next part of the video chain but on YouTube for example this is only possible, I'm not sure if it's on premium [...]*”(P6, p.119)

P3 on the other hand would like for TikTok to implement a youth filter, a setting where minors would not have the chance to engage with mature content.

8 Conclusion

In this chapter, the findings from the focus group discussion are integrated into the knowledge from the previous chapter. Through this process, the important topic-related content is extracted and the research questions are answered.

8.1 Summary of Results

Although participants are all active users of TikTok, participants indicated that the choice of platform when watching longer videos is more centred on YouTube. Most of the participants believe that TikTok's short video content works better, which is related to the design of the platform's short video features. On the other hand, TikTok's short video format seems to have changed users' browsing habits. Users' patience for long formatted content is severely reduced, and they prefer TikTok's content experience more.

The average TikTok viewing time of participants depended heavily on the user's preference needs and environment. Each participant had their own unique engagement style, so it is not possible to define a specific average viewing time for TikTok users within this sample. It is worth noting that many subjects 'dabbled' in videos on TikTok for nearly an hour, while others preferred to use the platform only a few times a day. However, even with short daily use, many hours of content were consumed over a long period of time. It is clear that most participants incorporate TikTok into their daily lives, from being part of their morning routine all the way to being a primary source of entertainment.

Discussions about the authenticity of the content divided the participants. The reason for the disagreement in the focus groups was mainly due to the fact that users use social media for different purposes. Many users use social media to connect with friends and family, while others use it primarily as a source of entertainment. Overall, due to the unique attributes of TikTok and Instagram, the two platforms serve largely different purposes. In terms of content consumption, YouTube and TikTok were mentioned the most, while Instagram was mentioned the least. This suggests that, at least in this sample, the majority of users prefer to use TikTok or YouTube to watch video content. It is also interesting to

note that with regards to YouTube, all participants preferred to watch long format content on the platform, with no one mentioning that they had used the short video format 'YouTube Shorts'.

Regarding the interactivity of the platforms, the majority of participants mostly 'liked' and 'shared' the content and hardly ever commented on the posts. When it comes to audio-visual content. Participants generally agreed that there was little difference between TikTok and Instagram in terms of interactive features. Participants felt that YouTube was the closest platform to traditional media with poor interactivity compared to other platforms.

There was a lot of disagreement amongst the participants regarding the community building of the platforms. Some participants argued that because TikTok's are in the form of short videos, there is no strong sense of community between creators and users. Other participants strongly disagreed, arguing that the rapid feedback on the platform allows users to quickly engage with creators, and specifically cited TikTok's' live streaming option as a strong indicator of effective community building. It was also argued that YouTube is by far the oldest platform, and that its long history over the years has led to the creation and influence of many communities on YouTube.

Regarding the user experience of adverts on each platform. Overwhelmingly, TikTok was found to be the most user-friendly platform. This is because users can easily interact with the adverts displayed, either by clicking on them or by scrolling through them. Participants had the highest acceptance and most positive attitude towards adverts on TikTok compared to YouTube and Instagram, with the majority of participants praising TikTok's adverts for being less intrusive to the viewing experience and for the platform's design, which allows adverts to be easily skimmed over by scrolling without having to wait for long periods of time. YouTube, on the other hand, had the worst user experience regarding adverts, with YouTube being almost unusable without the use of the ad-free subscription service 'YouTube Premium' or ad-blocking software. This is due to the large number of adverts that appear before, during and after the video. This problem was so severe that many

participants used ad-blocking software to view content on YouTube, and the lengthy adverts turned users off to the platform.

In regard to ad engagement most participants shared a rather passive attitude towards advertisements on the platforms. Highly preferring to not to engage with advertisement and skipping it if there was no direct incentive to interact with them. If the commercial offered discounts or free goods the interest was naturally higher. Interesting to note is that while most participants wouldn't access links which would lead them to an online store, if they saw the product in a physical store, they would consider purchasing it. The majority of participants criticized the non-interactive nature of YouTube commercials, whilst viewing TikTok's integration more favourably.

In terms of consumption habits, most participants agreed that advertising campaigns do have an impact on overall user behaviour in both offline and online environments.

Participants mentioned that they had purchased products advertised on TikTok, and the majority of participants indicated that they were more receptive to and interested in 'sponsored' content, such as reviews or recommendations, than advertisements posted directly by brands, which were more likely to arouse their interest in the product and their desire to learn more about the product or service. This type of content is more likely to arouse their interest in the product and further their understanding and learning about the product or service. Some participants were sceptical about the authenticity of the content advertised by brands, believing that in-depth research was the decisive factor in deciding whether or not to purchase a product or service. Unexpectedly, TikTok's live shopping feature was generally well-received by participants, even though it had not yet been realised in the DACH region. Participants felt that the ability for users to purchase directly from the creator without having to jump to a third-party website or online shop facilitated the purchasing process.

When the focus of the discussion shifted to multimedia content, the opinion of most participants was that the content richness of an advert depends on the type of content being

consumed. We gathered the perspective that some users prefer Rich-media content and some surprisingly prefer lean-media content.

In terms of improving the functionality of the platform and suggestions for advertising, participants gave a variety of possible features that could improve the user experience. One of the things mentioned was algorithmic recommendations. This participant wished that she could get a wider range of content recommendations rather than just pushing out content entirely in response to user preferences, which made the participant feel limited. Another suggestion was the ability to play videos on TikTok with the phone screen locked or a timer off feature. The final feature mentioned by participants was a desire for stricter filtering of content on TikTok based on age, and they wanted underage users to not be able to access suggestive and inappropriate content on the platform.

The participants had suggestions on how brands should tailor their content in order for them to get a better engagement rate from the user. One participant focuses on the importance of subtlety of the presentation, citing the example of YouTube where constant advertisements make engaging with the platform less enjoyable due to the intrusive nature of them. Most participants value honesty in marketing and prefer the creative advertisement which makes use of a platform's features. When it comes to which content thrives on TikTok, the consensus opinion is that comedy is one of the most important types of content, followed by creative videos.

Now to the Question 1: *“How is TikTok's impact on user behaviour and consumption habits different and/or consistent with Instagram and YouTube?”*

TikTok has changed users' browsing habits, leading to a serious decline in their patience for long-form content, and the majority of participants have integrated TikTok into their daily lives, turning it from a part of their morning routine to a primary source of entertainment, and have demonstrated an addiction to TikTok. Users use social media for different purposes. While TikTok and Instagram offer similar services in terms of socialising, for participants, Instagram is more focused on keeping in touch with family and friends, whereas TikTok is more focused on entertainment. Participants preferred to

use either TikTok or YouTube to watch video content, with YouTube being more suitable for longer-format content.

Answer to the question: *“What is the perception of advertising on TikTok compared to YouTube and Instagram?”*

In terms of advertising, in general, participants' perceptions of adverts are almost identical, and there is no clear platform difference in terms of whether the adverts are officially published by a brand but are not entirely credible or highly engaging for participants.

TikTok is the most user-friendly platform, with participants being the most receptive to adverts on TikTok, while YouTube has the worst user experience when it comes to adverts. Advertising campaigns do have an impact on the overall behaviour of users in both offline and online environments. They are more interested in ‘sponsored’ content such as reviews or recommendations as these provide an experience that is more credible than adverts posted by brands, but ultimately in-depth research into the product/service is the deciding factor in deciding whether or not to purchase the product or service.

And now to the question 3: *“How do these differences impact marketing strategy, content creation and platform development?”*

Participants indicated the most popular advertised content on TikTok, and there was consensus that comedy was one of the top content types, followed by creative videos.

Participants gave some opinions that for the TikTok platform, improvements in the usage of features such as timed off, auto-play even when the screen is locked, etc. would improve the user experience and satisfaction of TikTok; appropriate content control and content push adjustments according to the user's age and access to different versions for different age groups (e.g. ‘TikTok (e.g., ‘TikTok for Teens’) are important. Regarding brand marketing and influencer marketing, participants expressed their expectation for brands to be more honest with their audience and to give correct and non-misleading information.

8.2 Limitation

Due to the rather small sample size the results of this study should be taken into consideration when it comes to applying them to any potential marketing development. While the insights gained from each individual participant can show a multitude of preferences which often times overlap giving a vague idea which features and formats function best for the average user of TikTok, it is important for future research to be conducted on a bigger scale.

Furthermore, the small sample of users can only give certain pointers towards average user behaviour but not paint a complete a full picture. Due to the direct “live -shopping” feature being delayed in the DACH-Region, the current state of e-commerce on TikTok resembles the other platforms, thus we couldn’t capture the specific TikTok user behaviour and comparatively analyse it to the Instagram and YouTube.

Another factor to consider that over certain periods of time social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and TikTok can change rather dramatically which in time could make some of the results not applicable to further research. This can apply directly to the advertisement on the platforms, while the current state of advertisement on TikTok seems to be relatively restrained, this might change dramatically in due time. Future research could be conducted specifically to look deeper into the advertisement engagement on TikTok since the platform is still relatively new in the DACH-Region and has not yet had the chance to fully establish itself as compared to YouTube, which has been active for nearly two decades at this point. It is also important to note that since this was a group discussion, some participants might have felt the need to conceal their true opinion and go along with the accepted consensus opinion. The fact that there was a strong disagreement between participants shows that certain aspects such as a feeling of community is depending heavily on a participants bias on the platform, they spend the most time on.

8.3 Conclusion and Outlook

TikTok has seen rapid growth in recent years in the digital space that has impacted the marketing space and customer journeys that have led to changes in the industry, it's important for marketers to understand the platform's unique attributes and how it compares to other market-leading platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. One major difference that can be drawn from the design of the platform itself is that it is primarily a short-form video platform with live streaming capabilities. It combines highly rich media content with cross-platform functionality. TikTok's social e-commerce functionality in various regions of the world such as the UK, US and Southeast Asia has been highly integrated, offering a direct e-commerce platform on the platform itself as well as the ability to live stream purchases, which was originally planned to be implemented in the DACH region in July 2024, but has been delayed due to regulatory issues. Deconstructing and analysing the main types of advertising campaigns that appear on the platform could provide Austrian marketers with a solid foundation for their own campaigns. Due to TikTok's unique young target demographic, it is important to pay attention to its underlying characteristics and how these users perceive and engage with ads on the platform. In order to make the attributes of the target demographic easier to understand, it is necessary to highlight the factors that differentiate overall user behaviour between short-form video platforms. This paper examines the user behaviour and consumption habits of TikTok and compares YouTube and Instagram.

In the empirical part, through focus group discussions, we have gained some insights into the behaviour and consumption habits of TikTok user compared to YouTube and Instagram users.

TikTok has caused a serious decline in patience with long-form content, and most of the participants have integrated TikTok into their daily lives and have demonstrated an addiction to TikTok. Users use social media for different purposes. For the participants Instagram is primarily used for social purposes, while TikTok is a pure entertainment service. Participants preferred to use TikTok or YouTube to watch video content, with

YouTube being more used to watch longer format content. No one mentioned that they had used the short-form video format “YouTube Shorts” as well as Instagram’s “Reels.” There was little difference between TikTok and Instagram in terms of interactive features. TikTok is seen as the most user-friendly platform when it comes to advertisements, with participants having the highest acceptance of advertisements on TikTok while YouTube has the worst user experience when it comes to advertisements. In regard to ad engagement most participants shared a rather passive attitude towards advertisements on the platforms. they criticized the non-interactive nature of YouTube commercials, whilst viewing TikTok’s integration more favourably. Advertising campaigns do have an impact on the overall behaviour of users in both off- and online. The focus group was more interested in 'sponsored' content such as reviews or testimonials, with in-depth research on the product/service being the deciding factor in deciding whether or not to purchase the product or service.

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Appendix: Guideline for the focus group discussion

Discussion questions in 6 segments

1. General Usage

i. Platform Usage:

- How often do you use TikTok compared to Instagram and YouTube?
- How long do you usually spend on TikTok during a single session? How does this compare to your sessions on Instagram and YouTube?

ii. Content Consumption:

- What types of content do you primarily consume on TikTok? How does this differ from the content you consume on Instagram and YouTube?

2. Engagement and Interaction

i. Engagement with Content:

- How do you engage with content on TikTok (e.g., liking, commenting, sharing)? How does this compare to your engagement on Instagram and YouTube?
- What features on TikTok encourage you to interact with content? How do these features differ from those on Instagram and YouTube?

ii. Community and Interaction:

- How would you describe the sense of community on TikTok compared to Instagram and YouTube?
- Are there any specific interactions (e.g., duets, stitches) on TikTok that you find unique? How do these interactions impact your experience?

3. Personal Experience and Perceptions

i. User Experience:

- How would you compare your overall user experience on TikTok to Instagram and YouTube?

ii. Content Discovery:

- How do you discover new content and creators on TikTok? How does this process differ from discovering content on Instagram and YouTube?
- Do you feel that TikTok's recommendation algorithm is more effective than

those on Instagram and YouTube? Why or why not?

iii. Platform Features:

- Are there any specific features on TikTok that you find particularly appealing or useful? How do these features compare to those on Instagram and YouTube?
- If you could change or add any feature to TikTok, what would it be? Why?

Research Question 1

i. Ad Awareness

- How often do you notice advertisements on TikTok compared to Instagram and YouTube?
- What types of ads catch your attention on TikTok? How does this differ from the ads you notice on Instagram and YouTube?

ii. Ad Engagement

- How likely are you to interact with advertisements on TikTok? What about Instagram and YouTube?
- Can you recall any specific ad campaigns on TikTok that influenced your behaviour? How does this compare to your experiences on Instagram and YouTube?

iii. Consumer Behaviour

- Have you ever made a purchase or followed a brand after seeing an ad on TikTok? How does this compare to your behaviour on Instagram and YouTube?
- What factors influence your decision to engage with or act on an advertisement on TikTok versus other platforms?

Research Question 2

i. Perception of Ads:

- How do you generally feel about advertisements on TikTok compared to Instagram and YouTube? How do you generally feel about ads on social media?

ii. Ad Content and Style:

- How would you describe the style and content of advertisements on TikTok? How does this differ from ads on Instagram and YouTube?

iii. Relevance and Personalization:

- Do you feel that advertisements on TikTok are more relevant to your interests compared to those on Instagram and YouTube? Why or why not?
- Are there specific features or formats of TikTok ads that you find more appealing or effective?
- How do you perceive the personalization of ads on TikTok? How does this compare to Instagram and YouTube?

Research Question 3

i. Content Creation

- How should brands tailor their content for TikTok to better engage users compared to Instagram and YouTube?
- What advice would you give to brands looking to advertise on TikTok versus Instagram and YouTube?
- Are there specific types of content that you think work better on TikTok?

ii. Platform Development

- What features or changes could TikTok implement to improve the effectiveness of advertisements?
- How do you think TikTok's advertising platform could evolve to better meet user needs and preferences compared to Instagram and YouTube?

Appendix: Transcript of the focus group discussion

P ... Participants

I ... Interviewer

I: Thank you all for participate in this focus group, thank you for your time. The topic of this focus group interview is a study on the use of short-form social media such as TikTok and advertising effectiveness.

This discussion is divided into six segments, General Usage, Engagement & Interaction, Personal Experience & Perceptions, and a discussion of the three research questions for the thesis.

The interview will be recorded for academic research purposes, and the recording will not be used for academic or commercial purposes other than for this thesis.

Okay, let´s start with introduce us. So, we need a short name, age, and location.

- I'm P2. I'm 25 years old and I'm living in lower Austria.
- My name's P6. I'm 31 currently and I live in Vienna.
- I'm P1. I'm currently living in Vienna and I'm.
- I'm P5. I'm 25 and I'm living in lower Austria.
- I'm P7. I'm 27 and I live lower Austria.
- I´m P4, I´m 18 and live in Burgenland.
- My name is P3. I'm 25 and I live in Burgenland.

I: Thank you everyone. Let's start it with a warming-up question, shall we? When you use social media platforms daily, what's your first choice when you wake up?

P5: For me, it's Instagram.

P1: This highly depends on my browse last night. It was like TikTok, then I opened TikTok. If it's Insta, then Insta again.

P2: In my case, it can be any of those three. It can be “X”, it can be Instagram or TikTok. It's hard for me to say which one I open first.

P6: For me, it's usually YouTube, actually, because I need something in the background. It's more of a morning routine.

P3: For me, it's if I get a notification that a new video or someone, I follow posted something new, then I will go on that platform. Interesting notifications, yes.

P7: For me, it's additional TikTok because um when I just woke up, I'm very tired and I need some sound in the background to not feel asleep again.

I: we're going to general usage segment now. We are all TikTok users, how often do you use TikTok? Compared to Instagram and YouTube? You can say it per day, per week, or per month?

P7: every day-

P6: TikTok, I actually do use on a daily, just for a few minutes actually. However, I think if you have interest in like niche stuff or travel or what, cooking something, you can find what you need in very short time. With the other platforms, you actually sometimes have to look for contents, that might interest you.

P3: I also use TikTok daily, um, it's more of the little in-between things when I have just a little bit of time, I just watch the TikTok videos and if I had more time, I would watch longer YouTube video, but also more on a weekly basis.

P2: I also use it daily, and I just opened my phone to see how much in a week, it's 16 hours, Compared to Instagram, it's for me only 5 hours.

P4: Different times of course. I use TikTok much longer and more often than other apps, because on Instagram I only look at stories and posts that are no longer than 5 minutes. I mainly use YouTube when I'm listening to music or watching educational videos, for example. I often click into Instagram, but I'm quickly out again. I'm only on YouTube when I need to be, but for longer, and I'm on TikTok almost all the time.

P7: I used to use YouTube actually as my primary platform to consume, but after having a TikTok, I think I'm getting impatient, because I don't have the like patient to receive the information. I have the aversion to use information within a shortcut.

I: I used to also use YouTube as my main social media platform, but when TikTok came along, I don't want to watch a video that's so long and contains too much information. I think like sometimes I would say TikTok washed my brain that I can only accept short, short videos in a fast speed. Do you also have the same feeling?

P2: Yes.

P1: depends on what content if like there. Is like my favourite YouTuber, So I will slow down, take my time to watch the whole video without any speed up. But for Instagram or TikTok, I will speed up the best.

I: How long would you stay in a TikTok single session? For example, when you open TikTok, how long you watch it just approximately and then you close it or change to another platform or just turn down your phone?

P7: I had to set up on my phone. After 15 minutes, I will get a notification that I should close it, maybe 30 minutes or even more sometimes.

P4: I usually spend 8-9 hours a day on TikTok, around 10-30 minutes on Instagram and around 30 minutes to an hour on YouTube. But it also depends on what mood I'm in at the time. When I'm studying for an exam, for example, I use YouTube for longer because I have to listen to music on the side.

P6: For me, usually about 5 to 10 minutes at max.

I: And why so short?

P6: Because I just use it to scroll through my recommended algorithm. And then I close it and do something else. And then maybe a few hours later again.

I: Okay, so 5 to 10 minutes.

P3: I use it while I'm on the train, traveling to friends or to work. This is quite a long time. And if I have nothing better to do, it can go up to 40 minutes or something.

I: 40 minutes, quite long.

P2: In my case, it depends just how much time I have in a day because it can go to really long. Well, it can be like 10 minutes, but it can also be one hour. I'm not happy to say.

P5: I actually only use TikTok. Recently, when I get sent videos, so I don't use it on my own. Probably because I really don't like these short videos. I stopped looking at reels that people sent me because I don't care. It's too short and I don't care for it. So, I actually prefer watching longer YouTube videos that actually interest me.

I: So, you prefer YouTube, some longer video formats than short videos.

P5: Recently it changed because, you know, I also use TikTok for a bit, but then I realized it's just, you know, so short, I stopped losing focus like P7 already mentioned. And I don't really care for it anymore because it's just too short.

I: Well, compared to other platforms, for example, YouTube, how long you stay in YouTube for once?

P5: Well, it depends really on the video, but the most videos are between 10 to 20 minutes, something like that. And if I watch two or three of them, usually while doing some housework or something, it easily gets up to an hour per session.

I: For all the videos we are watching, what types of content is your primarily consumed on TikTok? There's, let's see, lifestyle, makeup, traveling, cars, holidays, all those kinds of different types. Or about book recommendations, cooking.

P5: In my case, it's mostly, I don't know how to define, but it's jokes.

P6: like skits or something. Comedy skits.

P5: Yes, Comedy skits and something like that. Sometimes my girlfriend, especially, sends me some cooking things, maybe. But mostly it's just memes.

P2: Video edits from different like shows. I like that one. I like them as well. So I like this one.

P6: My recommended Algorithm, change from mostly travel and cars to also shorts of shows like "Breaking Bad" or something like that. Keeps coming. But I keep watching.

P3: I just wanted to add that I also get recommended shorts of shows and then I find shows that binge watch. Which is kind of cool.

I: P4, how about you?

P4: I mainly watch short, funny videos on "For You" page shows. Sometimes they are games or challenges, but also makeup videos and cuts from "Young Sheldon".

I: What do you guys think about the content? Different from Instagram or YouTube just in general, like what kind of content do you think is especially just on TikTok?

P2: I think it's more authentic, more, or less. It's more rapid than on Instagram, Insta is like clearer picture while on TikTok. It is common on Instagram, but I guess it started with TikTok. It's more simple way in more like, real life stuff, not like the perfect picture.

P6: I think I can agree with that. What I've noticed, especially Instagram reels. A lot of that feels just fake, like paid, influencers are being paid to promote some travel agency or something. But from what I've seen on TikTok, it is usually just people going to the place, making their videos, like a drone, drone video of the environment. And Instagram is usually, you can tell it's more the equipment that the people use. The cameras are very professional, usually, so it doesn't feel quite as authentic.

P4: I mainly watch short, funny videos on TikTok. On Instagram, it's more pictures and stories from friends, and on YouTube I sometimes watch series and educational videos, otherwise I listen to music.

P5: I think that TikTok is more casual or the content on it is more casual. But I don't necessarily think that's a good thing, to be honest, because I like to take the Zip account as an example, Zip account, it's like a company account. But they do this fake influencer thing where they have these people hired that are like doing it influencer style, news. I really don't like it; I think professional companies should stay professional and not do casual style content. I think it's a strange wave with TikTok, in general there's more influencer casual influencer style people on there than on other platforms at this point but yeah that's just my take.

I: okay then let's go to the next question in the segment engagement interaction. How do we usually engage with the content on TikTok? There are likes, comment, sharing or add feedback to a comment in these videos.

P2: In my case it's mostly like and share. For example, I have like my friends on there and I know what they will also be like that, so I'll just send it to them mostly basically.

P4: I rarely comment. But on Instagram and TikTok I often like videos and pictures that I like. I also often forward a funny TikTok video to my friends.

P3: yeah, for me, I like the content and sometimes send it to friends, but TikTok is the platform I least Comment on any videos.

P7: I never comment something, if I find something interesting, then I will share it with my friends, so I should only like it or share it, I never comments.

P6: I usually yeah, I found the same trend here, if video is really interesting, I like it, I rarely share videos unless it's maybe some cute animal video, some of my relatives like. oh, look at this cute duck or Panda.

I: what do you think it's TikTok is different by interact with content way, compared to Instagram and YouTube?

P2: there is like this thing, if you like want to comment on your own video, you can put this video in your background or you can use a short clip before it just for the poster will be linked but everything else, I guess the same.

I: Any other thoughts?

P3: Well, I think those who are liking it on Instagram real reports or on TikTok, can just double-tap and then liked it and on YouTube you have to repeat a bit more not much more but a bit more and I think it's easier to then like it if you're just having to tap twice.

P6: I feel YouTube is the most traditional out of the video platforms. It's the closest to actual TV because also the ad style but that's a different chapter I believe.

I: I think there's a different way for me, is that when I use TikTok I don't choose to like the video. I choose to favourite it. In my own user page on the likes, really less videos and on the favourite there's more videos in the favourite segment. because I have this weird super ego. I don't want people think I like too much video and I think that's what different to Instagram and YouTube because on Instagram if you double click on friends or other people's posts, it doesn't have a special segment to collect all the videos you double liked. I think that's one of the different engagement ways.

P5: One more thing maybe. I have maybe a different angle. Since you said engagement already. In my feeling, there isn't really a like for a content creator on TikTok. I don't think there's much of a community feeling. You know, because it's so short or quick that I don't think there's really a community feeling between the creator and the viewers. Because it's designed to, you know, get as many people watching as possible. It feels like the creators and their followers, right? They're not that close, really. People don't really look forward to a new TikTok, for example, or looking forward to whatever. I don't really think, like I said, I'm not the most avid TikTok user, but at least from my perception. It feels this way compared to YouTube, for example, where people, you know, are waiting for a longer video or something like that.

(Intense debate)

P2: I disagree with you.

P1: Same.

P2: Yes, it's short, but it's also more. Like you wait weeks for one video in YouTube while you can have 10 videos, but short ones. It also depends on how the content creators does their videos. Because, it can be 10 absolutely no connected videos, but it also can be 10 connected videos with each other in some way. So, a person will be waiting for another one to know what it is. Also, there is also "Lives" if you want to, like, interact more with the community. So, yeah, it's different from YouTube, but I don't think it's not possible in there as well.

P5: But do you think there's like a community feeling between the creators and the viewers? Like a community feeling?

P2: Yes!

P1: I mean, in my opinion, like for the YouTuber, like they always collect all the questions and do a Q&A session. And in the Q&A session, there's a lot of questions. And in the Q&A session, you will feel like you are interacting with the people, the fans between the content creators. But for the TikTok, like the content creators, they are more like comments immediately or "like" what your comment there. The interaction is

more on time. You don't feel like you need to wait for a few days, and you wait for the YouTuber's Q&A session to listen what you want to hear. That's how I feel.

P3: But they also have live sessions on YouTube. Correct?

P1: Just my feeling was the YouTuber or the TikTok creator like that I follow, they are not doing in the same way.

P3: Yeah, but I know that some have “live content” as well.

P2: There is also like, if someone commented your video, you could answer on this comment with a video. And the person will get it. And you can make it so much quicker.

(Intense debate)

I: That's very interesting. Thank you. Now we're speaking about community. That P5 already said he doesn't feel that community feeling on TikTok. How do others feel about community? For me, for example, I watch a lot of Panda videos. And I can feel that. I love that in the comments, we comment, give feedback to each other. And sometimes we add contacts and share the Panda videos to each other. I feel like there's a community that all the Panda likers or Panda lovers are gathering together through this content. For you guys?

P4: On TikTok, I would say that the people there are very helpful. If you post a comment, many people often reply to it. On Instagram, you tend to follow people you already know or admire. Here I often see comments like “very pretty” etc., to which the poster then replies with “thank you”. It's less interactive on YouTube, as you mainly consume the videos without commenting or interacting much. People often ask questions or point out mistakes in the video. But you also often see comments like “thanks for the helpful video.”

P6: I think every platform has some sort of community building. However, I also think in a similar way to P5. YouTube, because just the content can be up to an hour plus. And it's just the oldest platform there currently in usage. That even users from 20 years ago just had the natural time to build up community over that span of time. And for example, you see it also depends on the type of content usually. For example, I watch a YouTuber who uploads like once or twice per year. Very detailed, very long and very detailed analysis of some true crime or historical event analysis. And whenever he uploads, like there's like a million people, oh my God, he is coming. And they're like speculating on the topic of the video.

I: Any other comments? Okay. Then let's move on. I think this one is probably going to be a little bit hard. So, we're going to take a few minutes to think about if there are any

specific interaction ways on TikTok that you think is changed your interaction experiments. Something like on TikTok that's new for you by used social media platforms.

P6: Well, I know it's not completely new. But on TikTok it was the first time that I saw that. And how fast brands can plug their online store. Usually on Instagram for example. When you open it, you see a HOFER or something or BIPA. they do an ad, if you wanted to jump to that online shop, you'd have to go on their profile extra and click the link. And that will take you to an online store. But on TikTok, it's usually way faster. Over here, you still can't direct shop. Like you can in China or the US.

P5: One feature I thought was very interesting. Was the whole "Stitching" thing. Especially in the beginning. Back when it was still called "Musically". Then I thought it was really funny. And kind of new. I'm not sure, I think people still do it. Right? It's also a way to make interaction between creators and the community, a bit faster. Like P2 already mentioned. With the comment. I think that's pretty cool. But then again, TikTok is designed to just be content as fast as possible, as simple as possible. It's an easy tool to create more videos. And I think that's pretty interesting.

P2: For me, it's also stitching. And video answers to comments. I guess. That's all that came to my mind now.

P6: There was a few days ago I was using TikTok. I found a really interesting way. That the two content creators can set up one video together. When you watch this video in the bottom, you can see, Creator A and Creator B cooperated present the content. I think that's something pretty new for me. And when you answer or you give a comment or you like, this interact data will be received by both creators. I think that's quite unique. By the community setting, like we said before. I think it's also a way to gather more people to be involved by one content. Because based on different followers for two creators.

I: Yes. That's very interesting opinions from you guys. Thank you. Let's go to the personal experience now.

I: How would you compare your overall user experience on TikTok to Instagram and YouTube.

P6: Well, for me personally. If I like to watch car content, for example. I think TikTok is in that sense usually better. Because they show the features of a vehicle in a fast way. And usually, you actually see the driving part. On YouTube, there's a lot of fluff. And what's very annoying about YouTube is the ads. Which interrupts the video, especially if it's a longer video. I think YouTube, I only use YouTube with ad blocker. Because otherwise it gets really annoying. You have a five-minute video, and you have like five ads in there or four. And that is actually a huge advantage. I think of TikTok. It doesn't

have to add intrusions. So not that, not like a TV where there's a commercial break. And that's why I think YouTube is the closest to traditional TV from all of these platforms.

P4: Overall, I find TikTok more exciting and entertaining than Instagram and YouTube. There's simply more happening.

P2: Unfortunately, it's now also coming to TikTok. And now like sometimes you get, you're like you're watching the video. It's ending. And then a few seconds of ads, and then the next video. It wasn't like this, for example, two years ago. Because now they're like growing. And they're like trying to earn more money. Of course. It's now also coming to TikTok. I guess it will be more and more.

P3: For me. I'd like to. Watch a lot of. Content. And on TikTok. It's very short. If you want to recreate, it's not that. Easy. With YouTube, a lot of creators that make longer videos and have their own website. They also make "shorts". So now I can watch shorts and be interested in the type of cooking video, and then I can go to their profile and watch longer videos or go on their website to read all the recipes, so I prefer cooking content YouTube over TikTok.

I: P1, how about you?

P1: For me, it was quite similar compared to others. Just like in YouTube, I have some specific content creators that they only post long videos, I mean, I do like a routine for monthly to check what video they upload there and then slow down my time to watch it. But TikTok is the daily thing for me, so I cannot reject that.

I: And when we watch it, the short videos on different platforms, how do you discover a new content or a new creator on TikTok? And how is it different to Instagram and YouTube?

P2: I don't think it's that much different. But it's just easier to notice on TikTok. Because, yeah, mostly, I use my "For You" page. But it's the same for me with the, I don't know how it's called on Instagram, Explore or something. And also, YouTube also like suggests you similar to what you watched or the one you already subscribed. But just on TikTok, I guess there is more possibility to get more new content on "For You" page than on others, I guess. But it's just my experience.

P6: I agree with P2. A big disadvantage, I think the YouTube algorithm, the YouTube "For You" pages have the videos it recommends to me or videos I already watched a long time ago. On TikTok, you can find new creators very fast. I've never had that I got recommended the same video again on TikTok. But on YouTube, it keeps happening.

P3: Also on YouTube, you have pretty much the YouTube creators that are making "shorts". So, you either already know them, or it's a limited number of creators

compared to TikTok, because there are a lot of TikTok creators. I think it's easy to find new things on TikTok compared to YouTube, because you have a broader spectrum of content creators that are making "Shorts". TikTok's compared to YouTube, where they make shorts, but yet, they're YouTubers. I think it's easier to find new things on TikTok than on YouTube.

P4: On TikTok, I discover new content and creators mainly through the "For You" page. The algorithm tries to find out what content I like through various videos. On Instagram, I find new content through my friends, it's just the stuff my friends' post. On YouTube, I mainly discover new content when I search for a specific video, such as educational videos.

P1: Maybe in TikTok, my friends share me some funny videos, and I found this creator is very interesting. I follow the page. But for the YouTube, I mean, I don't have friends to recommend me some videos. Maybe it's my problem, but still, it's like there's no people sharing me. I'm just a new content creator, so I'm not following any new trend.

P5: Mostly on TikTok, like I said, I don't use the app on my own that much. I mostly get sent videos. So yeah, I guess through that mostly. When I get sent videos, I check the creators sometimes, and if I like them, I follow. So, it's mostly get a broad variety of content creators because I get sent videos mostly from people I know and friends. If you're asking about YouTube, the recommendation page, when you open YouTube, this is mostly where I browse other than my subscription pages. When I'm browsing my subscription page and I see nothing that I think is interesting for now, I go to the explore page and look over there. And most of the time, there's something that's interesting, n YouTube, I think the algorithm works pretty well. And for Instagram, it's probably mostly the same as on TikTok. I get sent reels mostly by friends. Sometimes I use the Explore page, but I think the Explore page on Instagram is mostly garbage. It's just random stuff, really. So yeah, one social media I use a lot as well is X. But X is doomed, really. It's so bad at this point. On X, I don't know if you're familiar with X, but you know, nowadays you get just random stuff on your own page, which is terrible because it's just mostly political hot takes, I get, really. And I also use Reddit a lot. But Reddit is a bit of a contrast because over there, it's kind of an echo chamber, because you only really get postings from the communities or the subreddits you're subscribed to. It's interesting.

P3: There's something I wanted to add that I just remembered. When I'm meeting friends or people in real life, like talk face to face with them, most of the time we recommend each other YouTube creators and not TikTok creators. Very, very rarely Instagram creators. But if we talk about recommendations, we recommend each other YouTubers because they make longer content or more specific content that is quality. On TikTok, we may send each other videos, but in real life, we won't talk about that.

I: Okay, thank you, P3. What do you think about the recommendation system? On TikTok? What do you think? Do you think the videos you get on TikTok are more appealing to you?

P1: Yeah, I mean, that's why I'm not addicted to it. They're always recommending me things I like. I mean, one time I was searching some workout video and then they kept updating me with that. So sometimes it's annoying because I just want to have a look for them. I'm down for that. And then they still recommend me, but most of the time I enjoy that.

P4: I would say the algorithm is trying to adapt. As I've been searching for a lot about studying recently, it keeps suggesting videos about studying, such as recommendations for first-year students etc., but also lots of videos about Semester Opening, which has to do with Germany and therefore interests me less. On Instagram, I often see memes that my friends like (have liked), and on YouTube, I often get suggested videos that I've already watched.

I: P7, how about you? How's the video recommendation you get from TikTok and/or Instagram differently?

P7: I don't notice any difference actually because currently I'm mostly on TikTok. But TikTok showing me, recommending me quite well, I would say. They target the needs for the need. Because recently I played bedroom and then I searched, one time I searched it, and I would get many like how to improve your bedroom skills every day. Yes.

I: If you could change or add a function on TikTok, what would you add? Or what would you do to put a function or features away that you don't like?

P6: I think the ability to filter out content from certain spheres basically, because I usually, when I watch TikTok, I usually watch the, like American or British users. Because I oftentimes don't like the creators from the German-speaking area because the humour is a bit strange sometimes. But when you keep scrolling and then you get a random video, you really do get a random video that's not really part of your interest so much. So TikTok does have to feature to prioritize your interests, but not to completely filter out stuff you don't actually really care about.

P4: I disagree because I think if you get a video that you don't like, there is a feature you can click on not interested. Yeah, you can give a reason why you're not interested. Maybe it's the content, maybe it's the user, maybe it's the music. You can choose that.

I: Okay, quickly, let's jump in the research question. How often do you notice advertisements/Ads on TikTok compared to Instagram and YouTube?

P6: Well, I think I can start off with that question. I think YouTube is very clear cut. You click on the video, immediately your ears get blasted by some “Rauch-Eistee” commercial, which is way too loud. But then the video itself is very loud. It's very quiet. TikTok, I think it's a bit more, it's not quite as abrasive, usually. When there's an ads, it's usually in the video itself, or the video itself is the ads, and then you can skip that.

P3: Yeah, for me, sometimes I don't even notice if there is any advertisement, because I just swipe it away, like, it's just gone, and see it, then I think, oh, no, I don't want this, and I'm swiping it away, so it does not really have an effect on me. And on YouTube, I'm using ad blockers, so I also don't really get any advertisements, which I'm not that sad about.

P6: If I may add to P3's point again, Yeah, I think you, in order to actually enjoy YouTube, you either have to have YouTube Premium, or have to run it in the browser with ad block. Otherwise, it's almost unusable.

P3: Yeah, you have two ads before the video comes, and then if it's a longer video, like, ad breaks, it's terrible to watch without an ad blocker.

P5: I have YouTube Premium. Therefore, I don't really see ads. Compared to TikTok, of course, since I have YouTube Premium, I see a lot more ads on TikTok. Twitter actually, or X. There are a lot of sponsored content or people that can buy postings or something like this. Yeah, I think I see the most ads on X at this point. And then is Instagram.

I: Now when we talk about advertisement, I want to be clarified. There's all different kind of advertisement in the content. Actually, there's official, so traditional ads. And there's also what we call in marketing on the table and below the table. So below the table is basically in this content, you don't get a clearly feeling this is a Ads. Maybe it's just a user or influencer or creator is recommending a product or service or a restaurant. But that's actually in marketing world also one of the types of the advertisement. Apparently, everyone's first thing is something like YouTube's commercial. And yes, sponsored content is also a type of advertisement, like P5 said.

P6: Yeah, I think on, for example, on Instagram, the sponsored content often tries to disguise itself as like a legitimate, ordinary video. That's why many times it feels kind of fake. On YouTube, on the other hand, a lot of YouTubers have sponsored segments in their videos, like this video is brought to you by “Skill share”, for example. And yeah, those are in combination with the other ads. If you don't use a premium or ad blocker, would make me stopped watching the video. It's like 70% ads, 30% content.

P1: I feel in my case, I'm like there's a YouTuber that she has lots of sponsored content, but I mean, the company may be paid for her so extra. She won't tell straightforward in the like in the video that this party sponsored. So, this will make people confused like if

she really like recommending for based on her use or she just recommending for sponsor.

P4: Generally speaking, there are ads everywhere. So, on TikTok I often see advertisements when you scroll like that and then maybe after five videos there is an advertisement, but as I said, you can just scroll on, you don't have to wait extra. And now it's also like that, for example, if you watch a video and then at the very end there is an advertisement, but you can also scroll further. And on YouTube it's just like that, you always have to wait 10-15 seconds or even longer if you can't skip it, which is annoying. And on Instagram it's like that, whenever I look at the stories, after a few stories there is also an advertisement and most of the time it says there, yes, if you need more information, you can click on the link. But yes, you can also click on it. But in general, I think that on Instagram and on YouTube it's just sponsored advertisements that just somehow show you, not adapted to the interests. And on TikTok it's sometimes a little bit about the interests, for example, if it's a recommendation video that a creator, for example, says, yes, I recommend the product and then you can watch it.

I: When we are talking about the different types of advertisements, what kind of type of the ads that can get your attention, so you can get interested in the content of the advertisement?

P7: So far, all the advertisements I get, I'm not interested.

I: Okay. That's one actually thing for advertisement. Yes.

P1: For me, it's like if they offer me some discount, if I got a discount code, that would be interesting for me.

P4: I usually skip the ads whenever possible. On Instagram I just keep clicking, on TikTok I keep scrolling and on YouTube I wait the 5 seconds or click on the video again. But I like to watch skincare recommendation videos on YouTube and then read the comments to see if it really works as advertised.

I: I agree. Yes.

P2: I mostly like creative advertisement, but I'm not interested in product, but simply in the ad themselves. I guess this is it.

P6: Now a days for me, if I see there's an ad for a new, I don't know, food delivery system, food delivery service and there's a big discount on your first order might get me interested. Like minus 50% off on your purchase.

I: Then let's go to the ad engagement part. How likely, remember, how likely are you going to interact with these ads on TikTok for example you were watching videos and there's ads coming in for "Iced tea" and in the bottom there's a link that you can click

and directly jump to the buying page, how often like those kind of situation, how likely are you going to interact with this commercial.

P3: Not very likely for me so I would not go on the website but for example if it's without "Iced tea" commercial that P6 mentioned I might see it in the store and then decide to buy it because I'm curious, but I don't think I would go to the link and then buy it from the website

I: Here another kind of type McDonald. In this ad you can directly jump to your McDonald app or via a website to play a game to win a Coupon or a free product from McDonald how likely you're going to interact with it, so like game kind of thing.

P7: so, I would worry if they don't charge additional fees.

P1: If it will consume my time, it's too complicated, I just give up.

P6: I agree, I think the most likely advertisement, I would engage with, if you actually get something tangible that you would realistically use, for example I can mention the McDonald's thing, having like a free burger readily available, does make the does make it much more likely for me to engage with the advertisement.

I: okay, for the ladies, one more different kind of situation. You're watching video you get an advertisement from official ads account from a brand, for example, let's say Douglas and if you there's a link if you click in and do a small survey and you can get a free sample. How likely you're going to interact with it?

P2: Depends on what kind of sample. I mean I have a really specific type of skin and I don't know if it's good for me, only for like in my opinion, it may worth it, but I'm not sure I will pay much attention to it because it's just sample.

P3: Well for me, if I would have special type of skin and then you would make a surgery and then give me a sample based on the survey. I think that would interest me a lot.

P4: Maybe I will do it. On TikTok, I sometimes interact with ads if they are well made and appeal to me (i.e. meet my needs). On Instagram and YouTube rather rarely, because the ads are often boring or annoying.

I: Okay, I'll give another scenario. You're watching your car videos for boys, for our gentlemen. You're watching car videos and in the between you get a commercial, from let's say "Skoda". They are doing a survey or they're doing a questionnaire for their new products or their user experience. If you do the survey or if you interact to it, you could get a car model. How likely are you going to interact to it?

P6: Probably not very, because with giveaways, the chance of you getting that car would be extremely low. However, I remember my point from before, just even that I'm seeing something I might be interested in, I think makes me more likely to engage by doing research about the product to see what the reviews or other people think about it and then I might engage with that product.

P5: I agree with P6 on this. So, I mean, I'm the type of guy who does do this service if I could win a car, you know, I just give a fake email, so whatever. Yeah, if it's content that is suiting to my tastes, then yes, like P6 said, I'm more likely to interact with it. But, this type of advertisement is, I think, more effective.

P7: Yes, I know that the chance to win a car is relatively low. I wouldn't waste my time to make any survey.

I: Can any of you guys recall a specific campaign? On TikTok or event promote on TikTok or like a pop-up store on TikTok that influenced your behaviour?

P3: I saw an advertisement for a party at a club and then I followed that link. So, I didn't win anything or get anything, but it was something that interested me and then I went to that party. So, specific events.

P6: Well, I think this was like a cross-border. It was a cross-border platform ad campaign on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. But it was, if I remember correctly, it was actually a political Ads for one of the newer parties. And that one became pretty popular.

I: But that did change your or influenced your behaviour on social media?

P6: Well, yeah. Yeah. I think it's also becoming a bit more, not sceptical necessarily, but because most of their ads used to be, didn't have that much to do with their message. But I often think if I believe video to be an ad, it's like before they reveal that the product or service, I'm like, what are you guys trying to sell me here? And then very crucial if I swipe away or click out of the video.

P1: For me, TikTok, I saw there's a pop-up store. Yeah. For Haiti, for Haiti, this brand only knew by Chinese, it's XICHA. They have a pop-up store in French. I was really Envy that because mostly those kinds of events that are existing in Austria. And there's another also event promote I saw on TikTok. It's for the ketchup brand. And I saw that, so I went shopping and pass by the counter they have and get a free ketchup. For me, I think if, like you guys said, if it's the thing we are interested, it does actually do some influence our behaviour in a digital environment or offline.

I: If we can recall, is it any difference between Instagram and YouTube and TikTok for you?

P6: I think personally, Instagram, I've never, never saw any type of ad I was very likely to interact with. TikTok, as you mentioned, yeah, specifically products or food, stuff like that is usually more interesting. I don't know why specifically.

P5: I have to say for me, personally, sometimes the Instagram ads are more on point than any other ads. But that might be. That might be because I use, probably use Instagram the most out of all the social medias. So, yeah, that might be why, because maybe it knows me best. But yeah, I think the Instagram ads in general are actually pretty good.

I: More accurately?

P5: Yeah, they're better targeted. So, it's also kind of scary, to be honest. Because sometimes. I'm just Googling stuff and suddenly I get a recommendation or something like this on Instagram.

I: Yes, I think that's shared big data.

P3: For me, I don't think I've ever went away from YouTube to one of the recommended ad websites ever. On Instagram and TikTok, yes, but on YouTube, never. It's just so general. It's like, this new TV screening product, it's so not advertised to me, that I really don't care about it, so I don't click on any of it.

I: Have any of you bought something through the brand you see on TikTok? This could be online or offline.

P4: For example, on TikTok, when I see skincare products, I would maybe try to try it first, but then of course I also look at the comments to see if it's really the way it's going to be. I've actually bought products after seeing them on TikTok because the recommendations often seem honest. This happens to me less often on Instagram and YouTube because I trust the advertising there less. (e.g. liquid illuminator from no cosmetic). I would say that I first check whether the offer meets my needs. For example, if I see an advertisement for bicycles, I wouldn't want to buy it if I don't need a bicycle at the moment. It's also important that it's a brand that I know or that has a good reputation. Finally, I look at the comments and then decide whether I want to buy the product or not.

P2: I mean, not commercials, I mean, it's just someone tastes it and talks about it, yes, but if it's like a visible commercial, no, I don't think I did it.

P6: I actually think once, but that was a commercial for a game. I'm actually from a game, which was "World of Tanks", but then I did try it.

P1: For me, it's like if I saw a commercial advertisement, like I will notice down that they have something and I'm interested in that, but I won't right away to click their

website to make the decision. It's more like I do more research on that and I will think, okay. I will buy that. It's a commercial, just like contents, like a 10% of my decision.

P7: I once bought a thing that you can clean your floor with. Okay. As they said, you can remove. Everything, all the stains and it didn't. And that changed me after that. Every time I saw a commercial or recommendation by creators, I do research first. I guess it kind of influenced me.

I: when we are talking about this buying purchase intention, does it different to Instagram or YouTube? YouTube, apparently from all the answers, no, but Instagram, like when you saw a recommendation or a commercial on Instagram, are you going to trust it more than TikTok or YouTube?

P6: Yeah. I don't, I don't really watch ads on YouTube anymore because there's just way too many of them. Instagram, well, it's the. It's probably the least likely out of all of them, where I would interact. However, uh, if it's something travel related, I guess, I would more likely engage with it just like see what the surrounding landscape looks like, for example, uh, ads about some tourist spots in China, for example.

I: And what's the factors? If, if you. To, to decide to get engaged or not engaged to this advertisement factors, for example, content or type, topic, influencers, music.

P6: For me it would be presentation first and foremost. If the ad is extremely loud, I immediately click out of it. I can't, I cannot stand a loud, really loud ads.

I: P3, how about you? What kind of factors do you think can influence you?

P3: Well, if I see a famous person in the ad, I just feel like they just use their face because their product is not good enough. So famous people actually, um, don't make me want to buy it now. I've seen people that are somewhat famous promoting some, game, some phone game, and I was like, wow, they're struggling really hard to have to do that., so no celebrities would help. if it's cute or interesting, I'm going to keep watching. If I'm bored after a short time, I'm going to skip it. But, even if I watch it till the end because it's cute, like, we still won't buy it. But I will, watch it till the end. On one instance, on a few, in the past, I got recommended shops for dresses. And then I was like, ah, it's 70% off, so I went on there. And then the dresses were really, really cheap. But I also found out that a lot of these online shops are either they don't send you what you ordered or they're scams and don't send you anything. I think it's very easy to get scammed on Instagram. Mm-hmm. Um, not so much on YouTube because they're, I don't know, maybe they're more regulated or they're more big companies to Advertise that. On Instagram and TikTok, it's kind of like running online shops. Now I don't go on those anymore because I know there's been scams. So, something that looks too good to be true is most likely a scam.

P1: I want to talk is, recently I watched, I saw that I saw lots of recommendations, Viennese restaurant recommendation videos on Instagram. I mean, the creators, she did really good videos, the music, the light, everything is perfect. But there's no, I mean, in her, all the videos, there's no bad words for the restaurants. Only the good things for the restaurants. So, I knew that. So, she just recommends for recommend. It's not, like, something true. Because I don't believe that there's no, like, there's all this every restaurant fits her appetites. And there's nothing that she won't recommend. So, I mean, I will really care about the contents of the advertise or the videos that they create. Being honest for me is really important.

P2: In my case, I guess it's how much it aligns with my interest. Like, if it's really general. Then I probably won't be interested. But it's somehow, yeah, based on my lifestyle, maybe I'll do.

P7: I think it really depends on the content. Because I don't care about who is, who's the influencer or, or any people on music. I only care about the content.

P4: So, in general, if it's an advertisement, I would look at what he's talking about at all. Just about a product or about traveling or something. And then I would just think if it interested me, if it meets my needs. If not, then I'll just keep scrolling. If so, then maybe I'll just look at it. And if I don't like it, then I'll just keep going.

I: How does everyone just generally feel about the ads on TikTok?

P2: I'm getting more and more pissed because they are getting more, they are becoming more and more, a lot of them.

P6: Well, in my case, I would, I would say that, because the types of videos I consume on TikTok, there's not that many ads yet, because even for example, the car stuff, most, most of the content is made by private people and there's not really that many influencers because cars themselves are fairly expensive. And I think advertisers know that young people nowadays don't have the budget to buy a big sports car.

P4: I notice ads on TikTok quite often, but they bother me less than on Instagram and YouTube because they are often creative and well-integrated into the content. On Instagram I often see sponsored posts and stories, and on YouTube there are ads before and during the videos, which are often annoying because you can't skip them. The ads on TikTok are often short and sometimes even creative, and they blend in well with the rest of the content. On Instagram, ads mostly consist of images that try to grab attention with headlines, and there is often a link to get more information. On YouTube, ads are often longer and more boring.

P5: What I feel about commercials? I mean, I get what I think. necessary but online advertisement is usually not that influential in my opinion. I'm one who when I see okay

when I see a product, I do a lot of research on it especially if it's a bit pricier. I look at a lot of reviews and I look at a lot of those cases you know. I just I don't buy things simply because I see an advertisement, but I might get interested in it so at least that's what they tell me.

P3: There's one thing I would like to add. I feel like they're going to increase the advertisements on TikTok or Instagram so much that people get so annoyed of it that they then can offer a premium account where you do not have to see the ads anymore. I think that's going to be the future like we've seen on YouTube. I noticed TikTok recently started providing premium content so if you follow this influencer and his video is about two to three minutes, and you can see the first 15 seconds and if you want to watch more you have to subscribe him.

P7: I only notice this kind of thing on YouTube.

I: let's move on I think this one could be a real discuss. For the video format, so all the short videos are fit for phone or iPad. What kind of a specific feature you think tick-tock ads are more appealing? there's video format picture text format and I think landing page, so you click you know in a link you get a whole page about this commercial.

P2: I don't think they're appealing to me it doesn't really change anything the format.

P4: On TikTok, I find the short clips and the option to react directly to ads or skip them particularly appealing.

P6: I think the best way to handle ads of course the ads have to exist somewhere for to make some revenue because our video platforms are extremely expensive for companies, I think the best way to handle them would make them as non-intrusive to the content as possible. Like many years back so uh YouTube actually did it fairly well I think where there was banners and stuff like that on the side and not like the nowadays where you get blasted by ads just clicking on the video by accident.

(The participants are fairly silent)

I: Do you think that as the push as you get from tick-tock is actually personalized to you or special to you that more fits for interest.

P2: I guess they are more focused on locations than your interests.

P6: I get a lot of ads in regard to stuff to do around Vienna.

P4: I think it's also that you just get ads about Vienna but also, I get a lot of skin care products because I'm just interested then I get a lot more about it. I find the personalization of advertising on TikTok to be pretty good. It often shows me products that really interest me, compared to Instagram and YouTube.

I: I just thought about sorry it's not on the guideline do you watch live stream on TikTok?

5 of the Interviewee: NO!.

P2: I can like accidentally to jump in um I did to watch it but like really shortly like five minutes max. and then I'm just leaving.

I: now let's talk about the next question. The implications of difference different marketing. How you think how the brand tailor should their content for TikTok to get better engaged from you guys? As a user how do you feel like you want the brands to push their content or their commercials or their events more that you could probably get more engaged with them.

P6: I think I mentioned before is, I think the best way to spread out the mess a message about the product or service is to not make it feel like the customer, like the potential customer has to watch something in order to get what he actually wants to. If the advertisement is a bit more subtle, I assume or it's not intrusive into the content itself, because there's a reason why most people who watch YouTube for example use "AdBlock" or premium, because the ad are almost make the platform unwatchable at this point. I hope TikTok doesn't end up the same way.

P3: it's um that, if I'm interested in like I want new skincare or hair products I will watch someone who in my opinion gives um good feedback so talks about good products and bad products and doesn't seem too sponsored so they get actual like a real answer to my questions if I should buy this product and then I also look through the comments to find out if other people also agree with what this person says so if it's something I specifically look for I will specifically look for that creator and um that's how I think I would be influenced if I am doing my research in this kind of way.

P6: I'd like to add to P3's point I think that's a good point uh creators or let's say brands who advertise something, and you check the comments, I would be more likely to engage with that brand if the comments are not censored or filtered. If they allow uh negative comments that means they're probably more likely to be reliable service

P1: I also want and for that as I said before like the advertisement, I mean it should be like advertising show the advantage of the product but be honest to the customer to like not treat your customer like a dumbass they are pretty smart that you expect it.

P2: For me it depends what kind of brand that is for every like if it's like clothes then it's like have to be like i don't know more visual if it's like product, I would probably like to hear about yeah the new product for example, how it's in the work like to know more if it's like for clothes it's enough to see then for products, I like to hear like the effects and stuff like this, I guess.

P4: Brands should make their content on TikTok more creative and shorter to better reach users. Since users are used to watching short clips here, funny and creative clips work better than simple, boring promotional videos. I would advise brands to involve influencers who present their products in an honest and entertaining way. For TikTok specifically, short, creative videos that are somehow interactive or entertaining work best. TikTok's advertising platform could evolve by offering even more personalized and creative advertising options that don't get on users' nerves but really engage them.

P3: For example, Christmas time, when I saw a lot of people trying out products they found on Amazon, and I think that would be a fun gift for someone I want to give something to, then I think I would be influenced by that, because then I would go to their Amazon link and see if I still think it's good. So, if it's a seasonal thing and I'm looking for presents, I think TikTok is actually a pretty good place to find a few things.

I: Are there any specific type of content you think works better on TikTok than Instagram or YouTube?

P6: I think probably stuff with comedy, maybe comedy skits, work better, because making long-form comedy is disproportionately harder than short-form.

P4: I think that short videos one should choose to imagine that the videos are a lot more creative than long-form videos on TikTok.

I: And is anyone involved with those challenges on TikTok? Involve with those challenges on TikTok?

(The participants are fairly silent)

P3: I have seen some people on Instagram that they post in your story, like, so show me the last photo of your camera roll, and then they send it to friends, and then they also answer on their story with the last photo on their camera roll. But I don't feel like that's much of a challenge. It's more like something you do with friends, but not some crazy stuff where you're filming yourself eating a spoonful of cinnamon or something. So I don't know anyone who's done that in my circle of friends.

I: I would ask you, do you think you're going to be gotten more interested more trusted or staying longer on this video if it's more multi content or multimedia in there.

P6: I think it really depends on the type of content you want to watch, if it's some documentary or something, it should have all audio-visual elements that are pretty well done. But if it's just for example some story or book reading uh feature multi-visual content is not that important, I think it really depends heavily on what you want to watch.

P2: It's hard because sometimes multimedia could be like I don't know it depends how natural it looks, I mean it's just not should be not too much, I guess I like more like natural, I guess.

P6: uh something uh because P2 mentioned, I don't like content where every two seconds there's a jump cut so there's someone talking, and he has to cut every few seconds to make a complete sentence just it just feels unnatural if there's someone talking, I want him to talk normally not to jump around the camera just gives me a headache.

P5: I think if you over you can over coamplify you know uh content like P2 said I think it's better to have one easy you know video like not too much uh in one video, because you can see it's there sometimes even on TikTok you know like these kind of videos where they have like so many effects and this and that all the time, it's just too much. But then again it depends on what kind of content you're making, but in my opinion it's better to have not too much.

I: What features or changes do you think TikTok should do to get more effectiveness of their advertisement? By the platform side, so for the people who want to put advertisements on TikTok, what do you think the TikTok function can be changed or improved? To get it more effectiveness?

P6: I would think, especially for product, because service is a bit hard. Well, maybe another service is also fine. Cross-platform integration. What would be, I think, very beneficial is that, if there's a store on TikTok, they would have either Google review or Yelp review. Like when you search, I read, you see 4.5 star or 4-star, 3.8 star. So, and maybe user reviews integrated as well if they sell something.

I: Then let's move on to the last question. How do you think TikTok's ad platform could be evolved better to meet the, to get the needs of the users? So, what do you want TikTok to do? Maybe can get more better on your needs or on your interests?

P2: For me it's getting worse because my bubble in on TikTok becoming more and more specific. At some point it's good, but I also would like to know something else and not only get like videos, only like on one of my interests. Before, I guess it was a bit broader, which was for me better, but now it's like getting more and more and more personalized, I guess. So, I don't really want it to be that targeted.

P6: I think feature that every social media platform or let's say video platform should integrate is the ability to play videos when your screen is paused so when the screen is closed yeah, because sometimes I like to put something in the background before going to sleep and with the apps that's basically not possible to let something run in the background I assume for TikTok that would be you'd have to have an auto play coming to our next part of the video chain but on YouTube for example this is only possible, I'm

not sure if it's on premium I don't use premium I use a browser version of YouTube on my phone because that works with AdBlock and then I can close the phone and play the video in the background without having the screen running.

P3: I would think that would be a good feature is that there are a lot of young people on TikTok like high schoolers or middle schoolers and I think it would be good to have a filtered version so that they don't see content that's actually inappropriate. I'm going to check on that because uh I know that the doing the Chinese people have that function so you like YouTube you can go to the teenager version of the app so there's a lot of content are filtered, I'm not sure if TikTok also had that but thank you last question uh there's a thing is multimedia content and original theory about my paper and in generally

I: Well, let's call it the end. Thank you for everyone's time and opinion. Thank you.

Appendix Exposé Master Thesis

Last Name, First name	Xu Shuang
email address	mm221801@fhstp.ac.at
Telephone number	0664/99216427
Date of Submission	04.12.2023
Supervisor's Name (assigned by the Program Management)	Andreas Gebesmair
Thesis Title	Unraveling TikTok User Behaviour and Shaping Consumer Trends in a Comparative Study across Leading Social Media Platforms
The research question of the master's thesis	<p>Problem Statement: Founded in 2012 in China, ByteDance, the parent company of TikTok, seized opportunities in the expanding mobile Internet market. “Douyin”, the mainland China version, debuted in September 2016. TikTok's rapid global ascent, particularly in Southeast Asia, became a significant avenue for ByteDance's growth. The acquisition of Musical.ly in November 2017 and its integration with TikTok further solidified the platform's global standing. Today, TikTok serves as a global hub for mobile short-form videos, transcending its initial Chinese origins and actively shaping the global social media and content creation landscape (ByteDance, n.d., n.p.). The platform's ability to facilitate faster, more accurate, and widespread traffic dissemination has propelled mainstream media towards enhanced efficiency and effectiveness (Gebel, 2020, p.175).</p> <p>In October 2023, TikTok formally disclosed the demographic statistics pertaining to its user base in Germany and Austria for the inaugural time. Presently, TikTok boasts a monthly user count of 20.9 million in Germany and 2.1 million in Austria. This signifies a substantial presence, encompassing nearly a quarter of the populations in both Germany and Austria (TikTok, 2023, n.p.).</p> <p>In this evolving landscape, TikTok's impact on information dissemination, guidance, influence, and credibility has led to industry changing outcomes. However, despite its growing importance in shaping online interactions and consumer choices, a notable gap persists in our understanding of user behaviour and consumption habits on TikTok in comparison to well-established social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook (Šíma, 2021, p.195). A comprehensive comparative analysis of user behaviour across these platforms is imperative for gaining insights into the dynamics of contemporary online engagement (Wahid et al, 2023, p.107-</p>

	<p>108).</p> <p>Deconstructing and analysing the multi-faceted factors of TikTok user behaviour stands to offer invaluable insights with far-reaching applications in the realms of marketing strategy, content creation, and platform development. Furthermore, the discernment of variances in these behaviours compared to conventional platforms can offer new ways for marketers, social media developers, and policymakers to facilitate new approaches in the fields of strategy, enhancement of user experience and adaptive response to emerging challenges (Šíma, 2021, p.196-197).</p> <p>Objectives: This study is striving to address a substantial lack of existing literature by examining and cross-referencing the intricacies of TikTok user behaviour. This includes looking at consumption habits whilst also drawing comparative analyses with established patterns observed on other prominent social media platforms. The fundamental inquiries revolve around elucidating the main mechanisms which govern user engagement on TikTok, comprehending the dynamics of content consumption, and discerning their implications on the processes underlying consumer decision-making. The research not only holds significance within the realm of academic inquiry but extends its impact to practical domains.</p> <p>Research question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How does advertisement on TikTok affect their user behavior and consumer habits differ from and/or align with those on other mainstream social media platforms such as Instagram, and YouTube? ● How are advertisements on TikTok perceived in contrast to other platforms such as YouTube and Instagram? ● What are the implications of these differences for marketing strategies, content creation, and platform development?
<p>Scientific and Practical Relevance</p>	<p>Scientific Relevance: Since TikTok has currently reached global market saturation, it is imperative to understand what makes the platform so relevant for swaths of internet users. A sizeable margin of the global young adult population (age 18-35) use TikTok (Lohmeier, 2023, n.p.). Despite the platform serving over a billion users in 2023, there is a severe lack of academic literature, which shows TikTok’s place in the market compared to other video hosting platforms. It is essential for marketers and other adjacent professionals to understand the nuances in user behaviour and content consumption (Šíma, 2021, p.200). Several companies and influencers try to set foot on the platform and establish their business model as a sustainable profit model (Miranda, & Dias, 2021, p.31). To thrive on these platforms, understanding factors which influence audience reach and maintaining these requires in depth knowledge about the primary psychology behind content consumption and the mechanical workings of advanced algorithms (Zou & Wang, 2019, p.3).</p> <p>Research within this field extends beyond a singular platform to contribute</p>

to the broader field of social media studies. It sheds light on the ever-evolving landscape of online interactions, user preferences, and the role of advanced algorithms in shaping content dissemination. An effective interpretation of these dynamics can offer advantages to stay on top of the rapidly changing digital ecosystem (Baumöl, 2016, p.200).

Additionally, comprehensive research within the acute differentiations in user behaviour cross-platform opens avenues for interdisciplinary exploration, connecting social sciences with technology and media studies. The findings may inform discussions on digital anthropology, human-computer interaction, and the sociocultural implications of active online platforms (Miller, 2021, p.97).

Practical Relevance:

Understanding the many reasons why differing social media platforms like TikTok, YouTube and Instagram are market leading is paramount for various industries.

In the realm of academia, understanding the psychology of user behaviour and consumptions on diverse social media platforms is paramount to structure coherent theories on market evolution and the spread of social influence through video-hosting platforms (Zou & Wang, 2019, p.5). Addressing the discernible gap in current literature by underscoring the limited scholarly exploration of TikTok user behaviour in comparison to other mainstream social media platforms, signals to researchers the imperative need for comprehensive investigations in this specific domain, thereby advancing academic knowledge as using social media platforms has become daily routine for many users. Even if social engagement is not always seen as positive light, many users find the daily usage of social media platforms as integral to their lifestyles (Chowdhury, 2023, n.p.).

For industry professionals, particularly marketers, understanding the multi-faceted reasons why the unique nature of TikTok propelled it within a few years to a market stable (Ceci, 2023, n.p.).

In TikTok advertising, various formats serve practical purposes for engaging users and achieving specific marketing objectives.

Branded Challenges encourage user participation and enhance brand visibility. There are several overarching categories in which advertisement can be broken down into. In the case of Creative Ads, these focus on inventive and visually compelling content to captivate the audience. The most common way for advertisement to be shown is through Influencer Collaborations. The approach here is to leverage existing audience trust and broaden brand reach. Another category which goes hand in hand with collaborations are the Live Ads. Here the goal is to engage directly with the audience in real-time. Live Ads can also integrate Shoppable Ads. They

	<p>introduce an e-commerce dimension, allowing seamless transitions from ad view to purchase. Another type of advertisement commonly seen in a Live Ad setting are Interactive Ads, they provide a solution for heightened user engagement through elements like swiping or voting.</p> <p>Each distinct TikTok advertising format serves as a tool for brands to navigate the platform, addressing specific marketing goals and facilitating direct interaction with consumers (TikTok for Business, n.d., n.p.).</p> <p>By emphasizing the necessity of adapting strategies to the platform's distinct dynamics it offers guidance for more effective content creation and user engagement. This is invaluable for marketing professionals seeking to optimize their approach on TikTok. Since the target demographic is the teenage to young adult sphere, effective marketing requires deeper insight on platform specific nuances. Content creators and influencers can leverage acquired understanding of user preferences, helping them craft content that resonates with the TikTok audience and enhances their influence (Sbai, 2021, p.101).</p> <p>Platform developers find practical implications in the research, gaining valuable feedback on user behaviour to enhance overall user experience and optimize platform functionality by integrating a multitude of various features from de-engines like Unity to “Live-Video API”. This contributes to the ongoing development and improvement of TikTok and similar digital platforms (Helmond & van der Vlist, 2019, p.16).</p> <p>Policymakers benefit from insights that may inform regulations related to user privacy, content moderation, and digital literacy, enabling them to create policies tailored to the individual regulatory factors which can address TikTok and similar platforms in specific ways. Social media can present several challengers to users, especially to those who join at a younger age, understanding influencing factors can make policy-making more effective at preventing potential harm to occur (European Commission, 2023, n.p.).</p> <p>The relevance for Digital Media Management: SS2023: Medien- & Internet Ökonomie WS2022: International Media Markets & Trends WS2022: Digital Media & Convergence Management</p>
Structure and Outline	<p><i>Table of Contents for master's Thesis</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Declaration of Academic Honesty – Abstract – Table of Contents – List of Figures/ List of Tables/ List of Abbreviations

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Problem Statement 1.2 Derivation of the Research Question 1.3 Objectives and Methodology of the Study 1.4 Structure of the Thesis (Outline) 2 State of Research <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Social Media Platforms and Evolution 2.2 User Behaviour and Consumer Habits in Digital Environments <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.2.1 Patterns and Trends 2.3 Comparative Studies in Social Media Research 3 Social Media and TikTok User Behaviour <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1 Media Richness Theory and TikTok <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1.1 Impact of Multimedia Content on User Engagement 3.1.2 Role of Rich Media in User Interaction 3.2 Social Influence and Information Diffusion <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3.2.1 Dynamics of Viral Spread on TikTok 3.2.2 Social Networks in User Behaviour Patterns 3.3 Customer Journey Analysis in TikTok User Behaviour. 4 Evolution of Consumer Habits in the Digital Environment and Comparative Theoretical Perspectives <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 E-commerce Integration and Shopping Behaviour <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1.1 Influence of TikTok on Purchase Decision 4.1.2 Comparative Analysis of Shopping Behaviour 4.2 Branding and User Loyalty <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4.2.1 Brand Engagement on TikTok 4.3 Comparative Theoretical Perspectives <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4.3.1 Media Convergence and Social Comparison 4.3.2 Media Convergence and Social Comparison <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4.3.1.1 Impact of Social Media Convergence Trends on User Behaviour 4.3.1.2 Comparative Analysis of Customer Journeys across Platforms 5 Methodology and Research Design <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1 Research Question 5.2 Population, Sample, and Research Design 5.3 Method and Operationalization (Interview guidelines and Content analysis) 5.4 Criteria for Validity and Reliability 6 Empirical Study
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6.1 Descriptive Results/Analyses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6.1.1 TikTok User Behaviour 6.1.2 Demographic Insights 6.1.3 Consumer Habits on TikTok 6.1.4 Influences and Interactions 6.1.5 Comparative Analysis across Social Media Platforms 6.2 Derivation of hypotheses 6.3 Answering the Research Question 7 Conclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7.1 Summary of Results and Research Methodology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7.1.1 Key Insights 7.1.2 Implications for Marketing & Strategy Adjustments 7.2 Limitations 7.3 Outlook for Future Research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7.3.1 Recommendations for Social Media Platforms 7.3.2 Platform-Specific Suggestions 8 References 9 Appendix
<p>Selection of methods und sampling</p>	<p>Empirical method: A comprehensive literature review will be conducted. Additionally, qualitative research will be undertaken through focus group interviews, followed by content analysis.</p> <p>Justification of method selection including limitations: To further study the topic, the author will explore the current research question in depth, it is necessary to conduct a literature review in a selective and systematic manner. The purpose of the literature review is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the background of the research topic and to present the current state of research relevant to the research question. The main sources for the literature review are e.g. books, journals, research reports, specialized statistics and legal texts from the library of FH St. Pölten, Google Scholar, Springer, ScienceDirect, Statista and governmental websites etc. (Ebster & Stalzer, 2017, p. 70).</p> <p>Focus groups are a type of research methodology that are employed to gather ideas and points of view about a concept, service, or product. The participants in the study need to be carefully chosen for them to accurately reflect the larger population which they attempt to represent, to explore and comprehend different facets of user behaviour and consumption patterns on TikTok in relation to other prominent social media platforms (Fleetwood, 2023, n.p.).</p>

	<p>Focus groups offer several advantages, not the least of which is their capacity to conduct exploratory research swiftly and effectively. Because of their interactive style, which encourages lively debates, researchers can effectively unearth subtle insights. Finding spokespeople for the target audience, nevertheless, can be difficult and challenging. Furthermore, a major drawback of focus groups is their inherent small sample size, which may not adequately capture the complexity and diversity of the broader target audience. Therefore, although focus groups help researchers have enlightening conversations, they are not always ideal for representing a wider range of opinions and demographics (Morgan, 1996, p.132).</p> <p>After the data gathering phase's conclusion, the focus group transcripts will undergo a thorough thematic analysis to derive comprehensive insights. The objective of this study is to gain a deeper knowledge of user behaviour in the context of social media by conducting comparative analyses to discover key differences and similarities between TikTok and other platforms with respect to how they affect consumer habits.</p> <p>Study population: The focus of this research pertains to active TikTok users within the age range of 18 to 35 in the regions of Vienna, Lower Austria, and Burgenland in Austria. According to official data sourced from the TikTok platform as of October 24, 2023, the total number of users in Austria amounts to 2.01 million (TikTok, 2023, n.p.). The gender distribution is approximately equitable, with 53% female and 47% male users (Statista Consumer Insights, 2023, n.p.).</p> <p>Sampling procedure: Age, gender, occupation, income level, and other demographic data will all be considered when determining the sample size (Ritschl & Stamm, 2016, p. 63). Age groups will be split into two control groups, one for age 18–26 and the other for age 27–35. Each focus group will be done with 6–8 interviewee. The recruitment process will be publicized through academic institutions, social media, neighborhood associations, and other platforms, with a concentration on Vienna, Lower Austria, and Burgenland.</p>
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Allfälliges (z.B. Firmenarbeit ...)	

Genehmigt durch Studiengangsleitung
(FH-Prof. Ing. Dr. Harald Wimmer)